JULY
10th
1925
25c

THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

Leonard H. Nason
L. Paul
Hugh Pendexter
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3 Complete Novelettes

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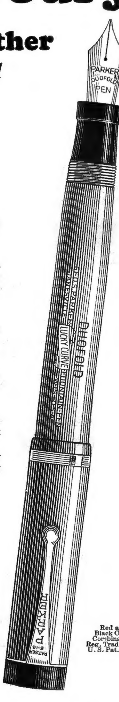

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Adventure

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Three Complete Novelettes

FOR years it had annoyed *Kaiti* that he had to share the kingship of his island with his two brothers; but before rebelling against them he first had to rid the island of the white men. "THE THREE TRADERS," a complete novelette of the South Seas, by J. Allan Dunn, is in the next issue.

BEFORE *Mohamed Ali* presented himself at the court of the sultan he was sure that he would turn down His Majesty's offer of pardon from crime, and honor in the realm for the nomadic life he loved. However, the sultan's proposition made him think twice. "THE TREASURE OF MULAI EL-HASSAN," a complete novelette by George E. Holt, will appear in the next issue.

WHEN *Blake Moody* rode up from New Mexico the Idaho people did not predict his fame as a cowpuncher and bronco-buster. But *Blake* made Idaho a live State for a while. "LUCKY MOON" is a complete novelette of the West, by Everett Saunders, in the next issue.

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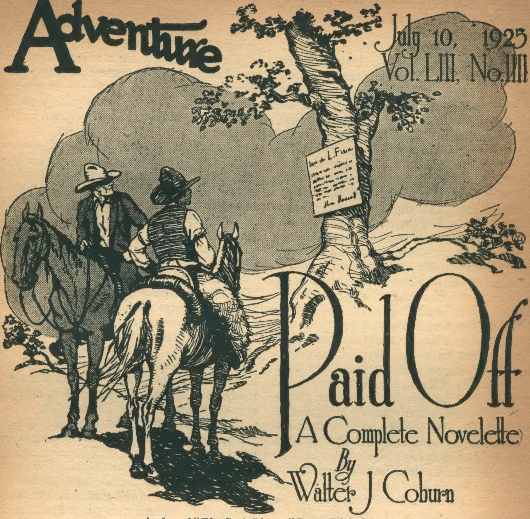

Paid Off

A Complete Novelette

By Walter J Coburn

Author of *"The Grub Line," "Deuce High,"* etc.

"BOW-LEGGED runt, eh? And my Skewball pony's a crow-bait, eh? And I'm too —— small for a growed-up man tuh tackle, am I?"

Each grunting, panting question was punctuated by a stinging slap. Shorty Carroway's breath came in gasps from between a pair of bruised, bleeding lips.

His weight resting on the heaving chest of the big man under him, knees jammed into the bulging muscles of that beaten man's forearms, Shorty's full-swung slaps jolted the swollen, battered face. Then the little cowpuncher's hand gripped the shock of hair and raised the big head from the sawdust-covered floor.

"Got a plenty?"

Shorty shifted his weight to one side and a sharp-roweled, long-shanked spur raked the ribs beneath the big man's heavy mackinaw. He grinned mirthlessly into the bloodshot eyes of the heavyweight champion of the Little Rockies.

"Yuh made a crack a few minutes ago that you was the toughest gent in Montana," grunted Shorty. "Yuh took in too much range, yuh sway-backed, muscle-bound, stove-up ox. Well I'm from Arizona, *sabe?* And down there, we got cripples that kin lay aside their crutches and whup you. Yuh picked on me because I'm kinda small and a stranger, and yuh grabbed yorese'f a handful uh hornets, didn't yuh? Got a plenty, —— yuh?"

Another slap sent the miner's head back into the sawdust.

Tad Ladd, partner of the fighting cowpuncher, paced up and down before a crowd

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of miners and cowpunchers who crowded backward behind the battered pool table and abandoned faro layout.

"That's my li'l' ol' runt of a pardner, yonder," he taunted the surly crowd. "My danged li'l' ol' bench-legged pard. Watch him, *hombres!* Watch him clost while yuh see yore Alder Gulch champeen git his needin's. Got ary more sledge-swingin', snuff-eatin', loud-mouthed fightin' men that wants tuh git worked down to Shorty's size and whupped by a gent that does it scientific? Got ary more nasty remarks tuh make about the ponies that me and my pardner rides? Got ary——"

"What the —— goes on in here?"

The voice came from the doorway in no uncertain tones. A gray mustached, white-haired man of stocky build stepped through the swinging doors. To the lapel of his open vest was pinned a sheriff's badge. A blue-barreled .45 covered Tad.

Behind the sheriff stood a mottle-faced, white-aproned man in shirt sleeves. The man's clothes were torn and dust-covered. His pudgy hands and mottled face were covered with small cuts.

Tad shoved his gun back into the waistband of his faded overalls. He grinned pleasantly at the sheriff, nodded, then his grin widened as he looked at the portly man in the discolored apron.

"So yo're back, eh?" he said pleasantly. "Jest like a danged jack-in-the-box. I pitch yuh out the window and yuh come back through the door."

Tad turned to Shorty, who, heedless of the interruption, was lending an attentive ear to the pleadings of the whipped miner.

"Let up on the big rock-buster, Shorty," he called. "John Law has done took chips in the game."

Tad's words had much the same effect as a bucket of ice water thrown on a couple of fighting dogs. Shorty got to his feet, felt of a discolored and partially closed eye, and reached for papers and tobacco. He grinned uneasily into the cold-blue eyes of the sheriff.

"Hand me my gun, Taddie," he said, his breath coming in labored gasps. "We'd jest as well be moving along, I reckon."

But the sheriff blocked the exit.

"I'm takin' charge uh the shootin' irons," he said sternly. "Ante, big 'un. Butts first. Thanks."

He shoved the tendered weapons into his waistband.

"Will you two come peaceable er do I put the 'cuffs on yuh?"

"Yuh mean we're arrested?" gasped Shorty.

"Yuh don't think fer a minute that you trouble hunters kin come into my town, bust out windows and raise —— in general, and not see the inside uh my jail, do yuh?"

Shorty turned a sorrowful gaze on his big partner.

"Kin yuh beat it, Tad? Kin yuh ever tie it? Looks like it's ag'in the law tuh trim down oxes like that bohunk settin' yonder, a-feelin' his sore spots. Down home there's a bounty on 'em."

"But we're a long ways from home, runt. And as the sayin' goes, we has fell among strangers. Montana ain't Arizona and our footin' ain't so —— solid as she might be."

"But dang it all, Sheriff," pleaded Shorty, "the low-down skunk was blackguardin' my Skewball pony. The best hoss, barrin' none, that ever packed a cow hand. Yuh seen him outside? Bald-faced black with stockin' legs? The fastest cow pony north uh —— is Skewball, and I ain't aimin' tuh have no quartz-clawin' pick-rassler hoorawin' me regardin' him! I'll gouge his eyes outa him an'——"

Tad's restraining hand kept Shorty from renewing the fight. The crowd surged forward angrily.

"Easy, runt," cautioned Tad. "Yuh won yore fight. We're plumb overmatched."

"Why the —— don't you take 'em to the hoosegow?" whined the white-aproned saloon man. "They'll be gettin' away if yuh ain't careful."

"I reckon not," said the sheriff. "I got their guns."

"Yo're plumb welcome to the smokepoles, Sheriff," grinned Tad. "Neither uh the durned things is loaded. Like our pockets, our guns is empty, as the sayin' goes. Likewise, our bellies. I hope yuh feeds yore pris'ners. We ain't et since day afore yesterday."

The sheriff gave the pair an odd look, then herded them outside. They almost collided with an extremely tall, black-clad man who stood on the sidewalk. The man had evidently been taking in the scene from outside. His height permitted him to see over the short, swinging doors into the saloon.

The long-tailed black coat, white shirt and black string tie gave the tall man the appearance of a minister. The man's face, however, belied such a worthy calling. Lean, thin-lipped, unsmiling, it was a face without a single redeeming feature. His eyes were small, a pale gray in color, set close together on each side of a thin beak of a nose.

A wide-brimmed, weather-worn black Stetson covered the head that Tad felt sure must be bald. The man's reddish eyebrows met in a scowl as he met the cowpuncher's frankly curious gaze.

"I bet he's a cross between a buzzard and a rawhide rope," said Shorty as the sheriff shoved them along.

"One uh these here fire an' brimstone sky pilots gone wrong, is my bet. Which of us wins, Sheriff?" added Tad.

"Neither." The sheriff's tone was sharp with annoyance. "You shore cooked yore goose with them bright remarks. Yuh'll git the limit now when yore trial comes up. That was Luther Fox."

"And who," inquired the punchers in unison, "is Luther Fox?"

"Yuh mean tuh say yuh never heerd tell uh Fox?"

"We're plumb strangers, mister. Let's have it. Both barrels."

"He couldn't help hearin' them remarks," mumbled the sheriff, musing aloud. "Hmmm. ——'s tuh pay all around."

"But you was goin' to tell us about this Fox," hinted Tad.

"Was I? I reckon not. I don't talk to nobody about that gent."

The sheriff's tone was decisive.

Tad, glancing covertly at the old sheriff, caught a glimpse of tightly clamped jaws. Beneath shaggy white brows, the sheriff's keen eyes smoldered with some inner fire. It was a dogged, sullen look, strangely out of keeping with the general make up of the grizzled law officer.

"Yuh don't mean tuh say that ole scarecrow has yuh buffaloed?" put in Shorty, wincing as Tad's spur raked his shin with meaning vigor.

The sheriff turned on Shorty, eyes ablaze with hot resentment.

"Who said I was scared? Whoever told yuh that, lied. Lied, hear me?"

The sheriff fairly trembled with fury. He seemed about to hit Shorty with the .45 in his hand.

Tad, poised easily on the balls of his feet, clenched his big fist and his practised eye picked the point where the well-placed blow would put the sheriff to sleep. There was a look of resignation in the big puncher's eyes.

Then the sheriff, with an effort, regained control of himself and turned from Shorty. Tad gave a sigh of relief. Striking an officer, even in defense of his partner, was little to his liking.

The trio moved on in silence for some moments. Tad, meeting Shorty's eyes, gave his little partner a ferocious look. Shorty squirmed uneasily.

"I'm askin' yore pardon, Sheriff," he said meekly. "I was jest tryin' tuh be funny. It was a fool crack to make and I'm plumb sorry."

His tone was sincere. The sheriff nodded his silent acceptance of the apology.

"I reckon it's shore gally uh me tuh be askin' ary favors, Sheriff," Shorty put in as they halted before the padlocked door of the log jail, "but would yuh kinda look after our hosses while me and Tad is penned up?"

"Uh course," agreed the sheriff. "Yore hosses will be took care of. Yuh won't be needin' 'em where yo're goin'. Better sell 'em tuh git lawyer money."

"Is it goin' tuh be that bad?" asked Tad seriously.

"Wuss," came the cryptic reply, and the two prisoners heard the click of the padlock as the sheriff locked them in.

In dejected silence, the two listened to the receding tinkle of the sheriff's spurs.

"Well, my short-complected *amigo*, yuh shore done us proud this day," Tad broke the silence. "You and that hair-trigger temper uh yourn kin shore git us into more trouble than ten judges and a herd uh law sharps kin git us outa. Yuh mighta put off the show till after we'd grazed some. I'm ga'ant as a dogie in the spring follerin' a hard winter."

"And if I hadn't took it up when that box-ankled shovel swinger insulted us, we'd uh bin run outa town for a coupla uh sheepherders. You was doin' a heap uh yellin' and so on, fer a gent that hates fightin'. It was you that busted that purty, shiny window by th'owin' that drink mixer through it. Yuh mighta slung him out the door, jest as easy, but no, yuh had tuh go bustin' things. That glass'll set us back the price of ten good drunks and a reasonable fine. Got ary terbaccer tuh go with this here brown paper, Ox?"

Tad handed over a thin sack with a pinch of tobacco in the bottom.

"Gimme butts on 'er, runt. It's the tailin's uh the last sack uh what was once a full caddy uh smokin. Fer which yo're still owin' me for yore half uh the price. Say, what ails that sheriff, I wonder? He like tuh busted a ham-string when yuh joshed him about that Fox feller. Shorty, there's somethin' danged queer about the whole deal. Raisin' a li'l' ol' ruckus in yonder saloon ain't no penitentiary offense. The way that ol' sheriff took on, a man'd thought we'd killed a few folks. Is them bars yonder solid?"

"Solid as rocks, Tad. Even if they was loose, we bin on short grazin' so long that we're too weak to pry 'em loose. If the paint hoss hadn't got drowned crossin' the Missouri and our beds and grub got lost, we'd uh bin to the Wyomin' line by now."

"And if you and that overworked temper uh yourn hadn't broke out and run hog wild yesterday, we'd uh got a square meal and a job with that outfit we struck at noon."

"Work fer that spread after that black muzzled wagon-boss asked me was I expectin' boy's wages and could I hold down a hoss wrangler's job! I wisht yuh had let me finish workin' that smart Aleck over, Ox. I was jest gettin' my second wind when yuh drug me off him."

"Say!"

"Huh?" Shorty, startled by the vehemence of his partner's exclamation, turned from his inspection of the bars across the one window. "What bit yuh?"

"I was jest rememberin' that black-whiskered gent's talk. Yuh mind, Shorty? He says to us that Luther Fox don't pay out good money to undersized gents that can't do a man's work."

"Man's work! I showed him what a man——"

"Dry up. Fergit it. Yuh don't foller my meanin'. Luther Fox must own that cow outfit that Black Whiskers works for. *Sabe?*"

"Uh-huh. And supposin' he does? What of it? Go on from there, big 'un, and let's see if yore words makes sense."

"Well, from where I was settin', that round-up looked like a big spread. They was holdin' a herd that a man couldn't shoot across. Looked like three hundred head uh hosses in their *remuda*. If this Fox feller owns that outfit, he's one danged big cowman, and son, we shore set into a hard game if we've hurt the ol' rannyhan's feelin's. I don't like the lay uh the land, Shorty; None whatsomever.

"If that ol' wolf sets his mind to it, our hides'll be hangin' on the fence afore mornin'. Yeah. And if him and his black-muzzled wagon boss ever gits tuh makin' medicine and the black gent 'lows we're the same parties that rode into his camp and raised a ruckus, me and you is due tuh stretch some rope."

"That big bohunk of a quartz wrangler'll be rearin' tuh work in the lead uh sech a necktie party, too," was Shorty's wry comment. "What'll we do, Taddie? Shucks, I hates tuh stay bogged down here till they come tuh hang us. I don't have no —— of a lot uh confidence in that ol' sheriff feller, if it comes to a fight."

"Yuh might uh done some heavy thinkin' along them lines afore yuh got us into all this, yuh fire-swallerin' li'l' ol' rooster. Now gimme butts on that smoke so's I kin smudge some thoughts outa my brain."

II

"'Way up high in the Mokiones, among the
mountain tops,
A lion cleaned a yearlin's bones and licked his
thankful chops;
When who upon the scene should ride, a trippin'
down the slope,
But High-Chin Bob of sinful pride and maverick-
hungry rope.'"

SHORTY'S voice, loud and high pitched, filled the small cabin. For once, Tad found no fault with his partner's singing. This, because the sound of the singer's voice drowned out what noise Tad might be making as he whittled doggedly at the pine log wherein the iron bars of the window were embedded.

Shorty, eyes fixed on the heavy pine door, sang with the air of one who does his duty in the face of great obstacles. Without missing a note, he gathered in a handful of whittlings and shoved the shavings under his hat, which lay on the floor. Then his toe poked Tad's shin with none too gentle contact and the whittling ceased. Shorty, resuming his seat on the edge of the bunk, sang on, head tilted upward, eyes half closed.

Thus the sheriff found them when he entered, bearing a heavily laden tray.

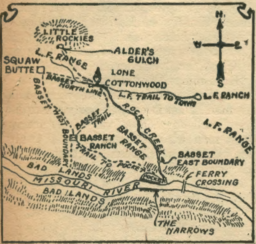
They looked innocent enough, these two.

Shorty, reclining on the bunk, Tad gazing broodingly out between the rusty bars in an attitude of silent dejection.

"Ten o'clock breakfast, Taddie." Shorty thus broke off his song. "Come and git it er I th'ow it away! Gosh a'mighty, Tad, it's real grub! Steak and 'taters and pie! Sheriff, yo're a plumb white man!"

The sheriff grinned and set the tray on the table. The grin gave the old officer an almost benign appearance.

"Have at it cowboys, afore she gits cold. It's the best I could rustle at the Chink's place. Yuh earned it, both uh yuh. My hat's off tuh ary two gents that kin clean up Alder Gulch on empty bellies and with empty guns."



"Yuh ain't holdin' no hard feelin's?"

"Not me. Joe Kipp ain't that kind. Personal, it done me good tuh see that big miner whupped. That —— bartender had it comin' too."

"Gosh!"

Tad swallowed a mouthful of food, washed it down with a swallow of coffee and eyed the sheriff in mild surprize.

" 'Pears tuh me like you'd had a sudden change uh mind, Sheriff. Yuh acted plumb ringy when yuh nabbed us."

"Folks was watchin'. The bartender had swore out a complaint and with Fox a-watchin', I had tuh go through."

"Yuh mean this Luther Fox gent is after yore taw? He's rearin' tuh jump yore frame?"

"Somethin' like that. Him and me don't waste no soft-spoke love words on one another."

He paused, scowling at the floor as if worrying out some problem.

"There's more than a few gents on this range that'll tell yuh I'm scared uh Luther Fox and 'Black Jack'," he finished.

"Black Jack?"

"Fox's wagon boss. Runs the LF spread."

Tad and Shorty exchanged grins.

"Black-whiskered gent? Eyes like a Injun?"

Kipp nodded.

"You boys know him?"

"We come by the LF round-up. Yeah, we know him tuh look at."

"Ain't yuh the boys from the south?" inquired Kipp. "I see yuh both ride double-rigged saddles and yore hosses pack strange brands."

"We're from Texas fust, Arizona after barb wire run us us outa our home range. We come tuh Montana tuh close a deal that was hangin' fire. Wound up our deal and was headin' fer our home range when we loses our life's gatherin's in yore Missouri River. Pack hoss, bed, money, grub, the hull works goes. Shorty's paint hoss which we're packin' makes a shore game fight, but 'twan't no go. The undercurrent ketches him and he goes under and don't come up no more.

"I'd uh gone the same way only fer Shorty. Yuh see, me'n my yaller hammer hoss bein' brung up in a windmill country, we ain't neither of us used tuh water in sech big doses. Mebbeso I got Yaller's cinch too tight er he gits water in his ears er suthin'. Anyways, he goes belly-up in the middle uh the crick and fer a spell it looks like me'n him's a-headin' fast fer the Big Range.

"I'm a thinkin' along them lines, as the feller says, when Shorty on his Skewball pony, bustin' that water like a side gougin' steamboat, jest nacherally ropes me, takes his winds and yanks me ashore. Yaller drifts to a sand bar and wades out while Shorty bails the mud and water outa me. Drunk er sober, my Shorty pard ain't much tuh look at, but there's times when he shows good p'ints."

"Shucks, Sherriff, don't pay no mind tuh Tad," grinned the self-concious Shorty. "He shore likes the sound uh his own voice. If yuh was tuh th'ow him and mouth him, yuh'd find his front teeth plumb wore down. That comes from his havin' his mouth open fer talkin' so much. The wind, a-blowin' to and fro across his teeth, consequental, has wore 'em down."

The sheriff was beginning to like these two oddly mated partners thoroughly. He moved across the floor to a chair. As he did so, he accidently moved Shorty's hat, revealing the pile of whittlings. Shorty manfully stepped into the breach.

Before the sheriff noticed, the little puncher had grabbed the handful of shavings and shoved them into his mouth.

"Now swaller," whispered Tad in an undertone, as he dropped his neckscarf on the sill to cover the freshly whittled notch at the base of the steel bar.

Shorty swallowed, choked, gasped and his tanned face grew purple.

Tad, moving swiftly, promptly up-ended Shorty, thumping him on the back with an unconcern that hinted of boredom. A wad of mashed potatoes, well wadded with shavings, spewed forth and Tad promptly kicked the sodden mass under the bunk.

"Will yuh hand me the water pitcher, Sheriff? Thanks. Now irrigate, runt."

He held the pitcher to Shorty's mouth and poured a generous potion down the little puncher's throat. Then, with a paternal air, he sat Shorty on the edge of the bunk and loosened his collar.

"Ain't I told yuh, time and again, not tuh swaller yore grub whole, little 'un? Dang me if I can see how yuh ever growed up without chokin' tuh death."

Tad turned to the sheriff with an apologetic grin.

"In spite uh all I tell him, that li'l' varmint will wolf his grub. It ain't the fust time he's choked down on me thataway. Onct, at a ice-cream sociable down on the Gila, a brockle-faced school marm, a-ketchin' him off his guard with a face full uh cake, ast him was his hair nacherally curly afore it slipped and left him bald between the horns. I'm out in the kitchen when the play comes up and he like tuh perished complete afore I gits there. The fiddler, a-thinkin' the li'l' cuss had th'owed a fit, empties a pailful uh pink lemonade on him. I tips him upside down, knocks the hunk uh cake loose from where it's lodged between his buck teeth and his briskit, and the show is over. We spends a good half-hour huntin' the loose change which drops outa his pocket durin' the proceedin's. I bin thinkin' serious uh knockin' his teeth out so's he'd have tuh graze on mush and sech light truck."

"Aw, let a man be, Ox," grinned Shorty, buttering his fourth biscuit. "If yuh gotta run off at the head, tell about the time that Hash-Knife hoss crow hopped with yuh and yore set uh store teeth swapped ends and like tuh bit yore tongue off. Only for the hoss a-pilin' yuh into the sourdough pan, you'd uh gone through life without a tongue. Yuh mind, Taddie, how that kettle-paunched ol' cook run yuh outa camp fer sp'ilin' his batch uh bread dough? He'd uh whittled yuh down tuh his size and whupped yuh, too, only I tripped him up. There's times when I wisht I'd let that ol' grub sp'iler ketch yuh."

A shadow passed the window. The grin on Kipp's face vanished.

"Here comes Fox," he whispered. "Play yore cards keerful, boys. Yuh whupped the best man he has in camp, Shorty. And he's done heard how Tad stood off his gang uh tough men with a empty gun. Down in that black heart uh hisn, he respects nerve like yourn. He may put yuh some kind of a proposition. Better consider keerful afore yuh turn it down.

"He's got yuh in a tight. He owns that saloon and the busted window. Fact is, he owns the camp. Reckon I'd better let him in now. He's poundin' out yonder fit tuh bust the door down."

With a faint, uneasy smile, Kipp rose and unbolted the heavy door.

Luther Fox entered with one long stride. His gimlet eyes were fixed on the remains of the prisoner's sumptuous dinner.

"Fancy victuals that you give your prisoners, Kipp," he spoke in a rasping, flat voice. "County payin' for such grub?"

Kipp's eyes took on a chilly look.

"I paid the chink outa my own pocket, Fox."

Luther Fox's thin lips twitched at the corners. It may have been meant for a smile. Devoid of mirth, it seemed to accentuate the cruelty that lurked behind the pale-gray eyes.

"I want that I should be left alone with these two men, Kipp. Clear out."

It was the command of a man who was accustomed to being obeyed.

Tad, watching Kipp closely, saw the sheriff's mouth tighten so as to leave the lips a bloodless, crooked line. For a long moment the officer and the cow man held each other's gaze.

"Fox," said Kipp, measuring his words with deliberate slowness, "I'm sheriff here. This jail is county property. I leave here when I get —— ready. If yo're aimin' tuh smell powder smoke, go fer yore gun."

Fox's upper lip lifted, revealing long, crooked, yellow teeth. They made the man hideous. His long fingers patted the butt of an ivory-handled .45 that swung in a tied holster, low down on his thigh.

"Whenever I pull my gun, Kipp, this county will be in line for a new sheriff. However, it's bad luck to kill an officer of the law. Our quarrel will keep without spoilin'. I'll word my wishes differently. I'd like a few minutes pow-wow with your prisoners, Sheriff Kipp. Will you be so kind as to grant so great a favor?"

His long frame bent at the waistline in a mocking bow. Rumor had it that Luther Fox, in his youth, had been a New England schoolmaster. Like rust corroding a steel blade, frontier contact had well nigh obliterated the polish that belonged to that former life. Occasionally it was visible, usually in the form of sarcasm.

Kipp, with a visible effort, fought down the hot rage that surged up inside him. He turned on his heel and walked to the door. Without a backward glance he closed the door behind him.

INSIDE the jail, Tad and Shorty looked up with curious gaze at Fox and waited for him to break the silence that followed Kipp's departure. Fox's lips were again twitching at the corners. Otherwise, his expression did not change.

"Well, what have you two got to say for yourselves?" he asked finally.

Long legs far apart, bony fingers twisting in a knot behind his back, he glanced coldly at the two punchers.

"It don't look to me like it was our ante," Tad grinned easily. "The sheriff tells us yo're holdin' the joker."

"Exactly. The way the play stands, I can either make or break you two."

He paused.

"Spread yore cards, mister."

Tad forestalled the silence that Fox had anticipated, a silence during which he had expected to watch these two cow punchers squirm.

A frown of annoyance brought his reddish brows together. He had rather expected to find the prisoners afraid and eager to please him. Instead, both were grinning as if they enjoyed the situation.

"Very well," he snapped. "I give you your choice. Either you go to the penitentiary or on the LF payroll."

"Penitentiary?" said Tad slowly. "Since when has it got tuh be a penitentiary offense tuh mix in a two-bit saloon fight?"

"Assault with a deadly weapon means a stretch in the big house," smiled Fox. "Crossing Luther Fox, you may find, is even a worse crime."

"Yuh mean you'll railroad us, eh?" said Tad evenly. He seemed to be musing aloud. "Yeah, I reckon yuh could. Me'n my li'l' pard is strangers in a strange land and plumb broke. Yeah, reckon yuh could do it, mister. Now supposin' we take yuh up on the other proposition? Jest what kind uh work do yuh aim that me and Shorty should do tuh earn our pay? I might as well tell yuh now, Fox, our guns ain't fer hire, if that's yore game."

"The job I have in mind for you two is legitimate and within the law," said Fox. "A rancher named Hank Basset owes me money. I hold his note for ten thousand dollars which falls due next week. It will be your job to ride to his ranch and collect that ten thousand dollars, in cash or steers. Since the man is broke, the payment will be made by turning over to me five hundred head of steers at twenty dollars per head."

"Mighty cheap cattle," grunted Shorty.

Fox shrugged.

"Mebbeso. That's beside the question. I am waiting for your answer and it ain't healthy, as a rule, to keep Luther Fox waiting."

Fox fished a long stogie from his pocket, repaired its broken wrapper with a cigaret paper and set fire to it. His little eyes surveyed them through the haze of blue smoke.

Tad turned to Shorty.

"Supposin' we leave it to the sheriff to decide fer us, pardner?"

"Suits me, Tad."

Luther Fox's eyes became pin-points of glittering gray through the smoke haze. His head thrust forward on a skinny neck, he peered at the two punchers. A sinister, hate-lined face, unchanging in expression. Behind his back, the long, bony fingers intertwined until the joints cracked.

"—— old buzzard," was Shorty's inward comment.

Without a word, Fox turned and strode to the door. He swung it open and shoved his head outside.

"Come in here, Kipp," he snapped. "You're wanted."

Kipp, a stub of cigaret sticking from the corner of his mouth, rose from his squatting posture against the log wall of the jail.

"Fox wants me'n Shorty tuh collect a bad debt from a gent named Hank Basset," said Tad, coming to the point. "We 'lowed we'd leave it up tuh you."

Kipp nodded.

"Kinda figgered he might pick you boys fer the job. Take him up on it."

"We're obliged to yuh, Sheriff," grinned Tad. "Mister Fox, yuh done hired two hands."

Again the twitching at the corners of Luther Fox's thin lips.

"Get your guns from Kipp and pull out. I heard your six-shooters were empty. You'll find ammunition a-plenty in your saddle pockets. Likewise a Winchester apiece, in your saddle scabbards. Here's an order on Basset for the steers."

He held out a folded paper. Tad shoved it in his vest pocket. Fox turned to the sheriff.

"Kipp, these two men are now on my payroll. The charges against them are dropped. Give 'em their guns and let 'em go. They're wasting LF time here and they have a long ride ahead. If you have any message for Hank Basset, carry it yourself, understand? My men are paid to carry out my orders, not to deliver your messages. I think, Kipp, that you savvy what I'm driving at, even if these men don't."

"I savvy, Fox," returned the sheriff evenly, as he handed Tad and Shorty their guns.

He ushered them outside.

"Boys," he said, ignoring Fox, "I loaded both yore guns. Five shells in each six-gun, leavin' a empty chamber under the hammers. When yuh ride away from Alder Gulch, jest remember this; them is good, honest ca'tridges, bought with clean, honest money. So-long and good luck."

Kipp nodded a brief farewell and reentering the jail, swung the door closed behind him.

Tad and Shorty gave each other a puzzled look, then followed the scowling Fox toward the livery barn.

In the corral adjoining the barn were their private horses, saddled. Also six more horses and a pack mule, the latter bearing a bed covered by a new tarpaulin.

"That gives you three mounts apiece beside your privates," Fox explained. "You'll help Basset gather those steers. Use your own judgment about any difficulties that come up, the same as any regular 'rep' would do. One week from tomorrow, I'll meet you at the lone cottonwood on Rock Creek and receive the cattle. I don't want either of you to forget that you're drawin' LF pay, and top wages at that. You'll govern yourselves accordingly."

"Uh-huh," grinned Tad. "Top wages, Fox, but not fightin' wages. Me and my pardner is peaceful fellers lessen we gits tromped on. We don't travel none on our shapes ner lead-slingin' qualities. We ain't wanted no place fer no crime and we don't figger on leavin' this country with a posse follerin' us. We'll gather them steers, but we won't fight none tuh hold 'em. I bin punchin' cows long enough tuh know that there's a nigger in the woodpile somewheres on this deal er you'd either gather them steers yorese'f er send some uh yore regular hands tuh do the job. We taken the sheriff's say-so about hirin' out and we'll see the play through to the last card, but we ain't doin' no dirty jobs fer no man, mister."

Tad had swung aboard his horse and sat slouched in the saddle, watching Fox.

"Get the cattle and I'll be satisfied," replied Fox. "Yonder's the trail. Basset's home ranch lays at the foot of that hazy peak. You should make it by daylight tomorrow. Follow this trail till you come to the lone cottonwood, where the trail forks. Take the right hand trail."

Shorty swung open the pole gate and Tad hazed the horses into the open.

Legs spread far apart, hands clenched behind his back, Luther Fox stood in the dusty trail and watched them out of sight. Once more the corners of his cruel mouth twitched oddly. As he watched the rapidly fading dust cloud that hid the partners, his eyes glittered with a look of cunning.

III

"I DUNNO jest why, Tad," Shorty broke the silence, "but I shore feel sorry fer that Kipp gent. He's right old tuh be pestered by a skunk like Fox. His nerves ain't so steady as they once was. I seen his hand shake when he called Fox's hand. A man can't do good shootin' when his hand shakes, Tad."

"He'd a played his string out though, Shorty. Even when he knowed Fox 'ud beat him to the draw. Kipp's game, and I reckon that's why we kinda cottoned to him. Besides, he shore fed us good. I'm wonderin' what he meant by sayin' he'd put honest ca'tridges in our guns? Reckon we're nosin' into a range war? Danged if we don't git into more jams than a burglar. Yonder's the lone cottonwood."

The sun had just set and the rolling hills were bathed in the subdued afterglow. The greasewood flat beyond took on the appearance of a dark-green carpet. Distant peaks reflected the last rays of the sun. A covey of sage hens whirred from the brush in front of the horses, then dropped out of sight. Tad and Shorty pulled up in front of the giant cottonwood, eyes fixed on a rudely lettered sign nailed to the wide trunk, a sign riddled with bullets.

> Warning to LF men. This here tree is my north boundry. The line runs due west to Squaw Butte. Ary Fox man that crosses that line will be huntin' trouble and he'll shore find it. HANK BASSET.

Tad waved a hand toward the sign.

"Yonder's the reason why me and you are picked fer the steer-gatherin' job, runt. I knowed there was a ace hid up Fox's sleeve. What do yuh say, pard? Do we turn back from here er go through with it?"

"We done hired out fer the job, Tad. Let's play our string out. Shucks, I'd hate tuh be bluffed out by ary sign."

Tad nodded thoughtfully.

"Kipp aimed that we should go through. There's more to this play than a bad debt, and I'm right curious tuh turn the next page. Haze that hammer-headed, pack-slippin' mule on to the trail and we'll git goin', pardner. I'm rearin' tuh git a squint at this here Basset *hombre*, providin' he ain't linin' his sights on my briskit. Likewise, li'l' 'un, bear this in mind. Don't go clawin' fer no gun iffen we gits jumped. Set tight and lemme augur 'em some. We ain't crossin' this dead-line tuh burn powder. If it comes to the wust and there's no other way outa the tight, we takes our own parts like gentlemen. We ain't huntin' no trouble and, on the other hand, we ain't stoppin' no soft-nosed bullets with our carcasses if we kin keep from it. And git a tail holt on yore ingrowed temper, *sabe?* The fust sign I reads uh you comin' to a boil and buckin' yore cover off, I knocks yuh between the horns. Hear me, runt?"

"Yeah. I hear yuh. Yo're bellerin' fit tuh be heard a mile. I ain't growed deef on this trip. Fer a forty dollar a month cow hand, yuh shore kin git shet of a heap uh advice. I'll remind yuh about it when yo're yellin' fer me tuh pull this Basset feller off yuh. Git along, mule."

Hours passed and the moon rose. If the future held any fear for these two followers of the dim trails, they gave no sign. Shorty rode in the lead, picking the trail. Sometimes he sang and as the words of the lament drifted back to Tad, the lanky puncher grinned his appreciation and hummed an off-key accompaniment. Now and then they dozed, heads swaying gently with the movements of their horses. Innumerable cigarets were rolled, smoked and the butts pinched out. Thus the night wore on and the first streak of dawn found them halted before a pole gate.

Beyond the gate, lining the near-by creek, were innumerable tall cottonwoods. A thin spiral of smoke lifted from the chimney of a hidden cabin. Twenty feet beyond the gate was a buck-brush thicket. Not a sound broke the quiet of the morning.

Shorty leaned in his saddle to pluck forth the wooden pin that held the gate closed. A moment later he straightened.

"She's locked with a stay chain and padlock, Tad," he called softly.

"Reckon we better call out afore we goes further with the game. Halooooo!"

He raised his voice in a wolf-like howl.

Followed a moment of silence. Then, in an ordinary tone of voice that caused both punchers to jump with surprize, a man called from the brush patch:

"Hello yoreself. Jest set where yuh be till we looks yuh over a spell. Keep the little 'un covered with the shotgun, Ma."

"I'll make a sieve outa him if he makes ary move, Hank. 'Tend to the big feller. Know either of 'em?"

"Nope. Light's too dim yet tuh read the brands on their hosses but ain't that paint hoss the LF hoss we seen in town last week?"

"—— a'mighty, Tad," groaned Shorty in an uneasy voice. "Start a talkin' afore we're killed complete."

"We're plum peaceful, mister," called Tad. "That's a LF hoss and so is the others, but hold yore fire. We come here tuh——"

"To finish robbin' honest folks, eh?" snapped a feminine voice that carried the sharp edge of a newly whetted knife. "LF men, eh? Come to do the dirty work of that pole cat, Luther Fox! Gun toters, by the looks of yuh. You seen the sign on the cottonwood?"

"Yes'm, but we ain't——"

"Shetup! Quit interruptin' a lady. Hank, watch that big gent, he's got a mean eye. Dim as the light is, I kin see it. You there, little feller, keep them hands where they belongs. There's eighteen buckshot in both these barrels and I'm takin' a rest across this boulder. Come to git them cattle that's due Fox?"

"Yes'm. But we ain't cravin' no trouble ma'am, leastways, not with women-folks. Joe Kipp, the sheriff, 'lowed that we should come."

"Huh!" snorted the hidden lady. "And what under the sun and seven stars has that old sage hen got to say about it? If Kipp had the gumption of a rabbit, he'd run the hull LF pack outa the country. He's stood by like a lump on a log and seen a pore ol' couple git robbed uh their eye teeth, and never once raised a finger to stop it. He don't dast set foot on the place, he's that ashamed uh hisself fer——"

"Hush, Ma," cut in the voice of Hank Basset. "Joe done his best by us. His hands is tied, drat it, the same as ours is. Now, big feller, how come that Joe Kipp 'lowed that you should come here? Don't try no lyin' er we turns loose these shotguns. Yuh read the sign on the cottonwood and me'n ma is within' our rights when we shoots. Git tuh talkin', dang yuh."

"Me'n my li'l' pardner is strangers, Basset, and we ain't takin' up no man's fight fer him. Kipp done told us tuh take Fox up on it, when Fox give us the offer uh the job. We was in jail at the time and the ol' buzzard was aimin' tuh cold-deck us into the pen, savvy? It was either take this job er go over the road fer a few years. We ain't doin' dirty work fer no man, mister. We're cow hands, me and Shorty is, not gun-toters. We come here peaceful and we stays thataway, lessen we're crowded bad.

"If I was a gun man, Basset, and was aimin' tuh th'ow lead in yore direction, I'd be doin' it now. That there bush yo're a squattin' behind ain't so thick as she might be. I kin see yuh plain. Yuh'd orter pick a boulder fer shelter."

A muffled curse and cracking of twigs came from the brush as Hank Basset shifted his position. Tad's eyes followed the moving brush tops. His ruse had worked. He now knew where the cow man crouched. Shorty grinned his approval at Tad's clever lying.

"Good guessin', Taddie. Now shoo that there settin' hen of a female from her nest and we'll feel easier," he whispered. "If it comes to the wust, we gotta run. We can't noways shoot no female women. I might try a pot shot at Basset."

"Hush up, runt." Then, in a louder tone. "I said my say, Basset. She goes as she lays. We ain't burnin' no powder here ner elsewhere fer Luther Fox. Yo're the doctor, *sabe?* If we're messin' into ary range war er such, we'll go back the way we come, with our guns in the scabards, and leave the job tuh them that wants it. From what I seen of the LF hands, there's plenty of 'em that'll take it. There's our proposition, Basset. Take it er leave it."

There was a long silence, broken only by whispering between the cow man and his wife. Then the answer came from behind the boulder in the voice of Ma Basset.

"Shed yore guns and light. As long as we gotta be pestered with LF men, it'd as well be you two as them others. Keerful how you handle yore hands while yo're coming through the fence. Keep to the middle of the wagon road that leads to the house. Hank and me'll have yuh covered, every step."

Tad and Shorty exchanged a quick look. Tad nodded briefly.

"Shed the cannon, pard, and we'll take her up."

They tossed their guns to the ground, swung from the saddle and approached with their hands in the air. The presence of a woman caused Shorty to blush confusedly, but Tad seemed to rather enjoy the situation. Once through the barbed-wire fence, they kept to the road. A bend in the road brought them in view of the buildings.

THE sun was just rising and both cowpunchers gazed in surprize at the scene spread before them. Low walled, log buildings, the sod roofs covered with green grass and wild mustard. Well-built horse corrals, branding shute and branding pen beyond. A well-irrigated alfalfa patch, blooming and ripe for cutting. A small blacksmith shop surrounded by mowers, rakes, and two roundup wagons. Everything neat and orderly, rare indeed, for a cattle ranch.

The ranch house and adjacent bunk house were whitewashed, and climbing the walls were masses of morning glories. Wild rose bushes, pink blossoms wet with the early morning dew, lined the gravel walk that led to the doors. All around were the tall cottonwoods.

"Gosh!" whispered Shorty, and removed his hat.

Tad followed suit. They halted on the threshold of the open door, carefully wiping their feet on the burlap sack mat. Tad sniffed the warm air that came from the kitchen.

From the service-berry brush behind the cowpunchers, stepped the oddly mated couple with their shotguns.

Hank Basset, shorter by six inches and lighter by some eighty pounds than his wife, was clad in faded flannel shirt and freshly laundered, neatly patched overalls. Slightly bent over, tanned the color of an old saddle, a bald patch showing in the center of his silvery hair, he was anything but warlike in appearance. His mild blue eyes twinkled with humor, but there was a look about his straight mouth and square chin that told of hidden determination and a fearless spirit if he were roused.

Ma Basset, red of cheek, her well-combed, abundance of gray hair glistening in the morning sun, was as neat as her rose bushes, and as fresh looking, in her red-and-white checked gingham. Despite the scowl that furrowed her wide brow, there was everything in her make-up to denote a generous, mothering personality. A bit stout, to be sure, but her step was firm and alert and her bare arms were more muscular than fat. A woman of the pioneer stock, ranch born and raised. As much at home in the saddle as in her immaculate kitchen, a fair example of the cattle man's wife whose courage and sacrifice has played so important a role in the building of the West. Even as her mother before her had fought Indians, so now, did Ma Basset wield her sawed-off shotgun in defense of her home.

Suddenly Tad sprag forward into the open door of the kitchen.

"Coffee's b'ilin' over!" he bellowed over his shoulder.

Shorty, left on the threshold, shoved his aching arms higher in the air and gazed with agonized eyes into the twin barrels of Ma Basset's raised shotgun.

Tad now appeared in the doorway, holding aloft the steaming coffee pot as proof of his good intentions.

"—— a'mighty, yuh big lummox," groaned Shorty. "Yuh like tuh got me killed."

There was that in the appearance of the two partners to cause even the stoniest hearted to smile. Shorty, his swollen eye a sickly green, tanned face perspiring and red from suppressed emotion and embarrassment, gazing beseechingly at his partner. Tad, his homely, rough-hewn features wreathed in an infectious grin, holding aloft the huge granite-ware coffee pot.

"Shucks, Hank," muttered Ma Basset in an undertone of relief, "them two boys ain't no badmen. Why that pore little feller is nigh scared tuh death. Don't suppose he ever hurt a livin' thing in his hull life. My gracious but that big 'un did give me a start when he tore into the house thataway. I was sure certain he was aimin' to make a fight of it. Lawzee!"

The elderly couple did not relax their vigilance, however, until breakfast was well on its way.

Tad, with his unaffected, loquacious manner, did much to quell suspicion. He insisted on putting on an apron and helping with the breakfast, all the while keeping up an aimless chatter with the lady of the house. More than often he had her chuckling gaily.

Shorty, in the front room with Hank, told a straightforward story of their sojourn in Alder Gulch.

"Yuh mean that you whupped that big miner by yoreself? Why, Fox claims that big hunkie is a ex-prize fighter!"

Shorty shrugged.

"I dunno about that, mister. If he's a pug, he's a pore 'un. You'd uh died laffin' tuh see Tad a-holdin' off that gang with a empty gun."

"And you boys ain't fightin' fer Luther Fox?"

"Mister," said Shorty solemnly, "when me and Ted draws our shootin' irons, we does it because somebody's crowdin' us er our friends, bad. We're aimin' tuh go back tuh Arizony some day and we got friends down there that we want tuh look square in the eyes, *sabe?*"

"Breakfast is about ready," called Ma Basset from the doorway.

Hank and Shorty got to their feet.

"Ma'am," said Shorty, flushing hotly, "our hosses is outside the fence yonder. My grub 'ud plumb choke me if I was tuh set down to the table afore I'd took care uh my Skewball hoss. Tad, I reckon, feels the same about his Yaller Hammer hoss. He'd 'a' said so hisse'f only he's a-tormentin' me by makin' me axe yuh, kin we be excused while we 'tends to 'em. The big walloper pesters me continual when there's women folks around."

Shorty was the color of an Indian blanket by now. Tad, grinning widely, winked at Hank.

"Tush, son," smiled Ma Basset. "Now don't you pay no attention to him. He'd orter be ashamed uh hisself, tormentin' a boy half his size. You boys hurry on now and tend to yore ponies. The key to the gate hangs on a nail on the gate post. Unsaddle and turn yore hosses into the pasture. There's blue-joint grass and water-a-plenty there. I'll put the biscuits and eggs in the warmin' oven. Hurry, now."

Five minutes later there came the sound of splashing water. Ma Basset, looking out the kitchen window, nodded her approval.

"They're washin'-up at the bunkhouse, Hank," she whispered. "Those boys has had raisin'."

"When a man sets down to his grub afore he's took care uh his hoss, watch out fer him," added Hank. "I was a-waitin' tuh see if they was goin' tuh let their animals wait. It don't take no smart gent tuh see that they're as different from the other LF riders as a gentleman is different from a sheep herder. I bin thinkin', Ma, mebbe so them two boys kin help us. They're kinda like home folks, sorter."

"Help us?"

Ma Basset shoved a second pan of biscuits in the oven and closed the door thoughtfully. Then she straightened.

"Help us, Hank? I'm afeered not. The cattle's gone, that's all. They're good boys, like as not, but they can't make a herd uh cattle outa a handful uh sore-footed cows and wind-bellied calves. No, we're beat and beat bad. But we ain't hollerin', neither of us. If only our Pete boy was back home, I'd feel as chipper as a meadow lark. But the thought uh him cooped up in a prison cell, kinda takes the warm feelin' outa the sunshine, somehow."

Tears glistened in her eyes. She seated herself on a chair and dabbed at the tears with the corner of her apron. Hank crossed over to her and put an arm about her shoulders.

Tad and Shorty had removed their spurs at the bunkhouse. They made but little noise as they came to the door and halted to wipe the dust from their boots. They could not help but see what went on inside the kitchen. Embarrassed, they looked at each other in silence.

"Our Pete sent over the road by that low-down LF spread, our cattle run off and a ten-thousand-dollar note due next week," came the voice of Hank Basset whose back was toward the cowpunchers. "It's hard lines fer folks as old as us, Ma. But we ain't licked yet. I kin still hold down a job punchin' cows."

"And I kin beat ary round-up cook that ever burned a batch uh beans er turned a mess wagon over," added Ma Basset bravely. "Yuh mind that fall when I cooked fer the outfit, Hank, and drove two broncs fer wheelers? I can do it again, too."

Tad, a vise-like grip on his partner's arm, backed quietly away from the door. On tiptoe they retreated to the bunkhouse. Then, with careless step and a whistle coming discordantly from Tad's pursed lips, they again approached the kitchen.

Ma Basset's eyes showed faint signs of redness and Hank seemed somewhat ill at ease. He led them back into the front room.

"Biscuits ain't quite done," he explained, waving the two punchers to chairs.

He moved stealthily to a cupboard and reached a hand in behind the curtain. It came forth holding a brown bottle.

"Ma keeps it fer snake bite," he whispered. "Have a nip?"

But before he could hand the bottle to the expectant Shorty, an approaching step sounded from the kitchen. Hank deftly slid the bottle back behind the curtain, a second before his wife appeared in the doorway.

In Ma Basset's hand was a piece of raw beefsteak and a strip of cloth.

"Fer your eye," she told Shorty, and forthwith tied the piece of meat over the swollen and discolored member.

"Your pardner was a-tellin' me how you

fell off your hoss and bunged that eye up," she smiled, standing aside to survey the bandage critically.

"Hoss th'owed me?" returned Shorty dazedly. "Shucks, I——"

"Nothin' to be ashamed of," she replied. "There ain't a bronc rider livin' that ain't got it some time er another."

"Never was a rider that never got th'owed," chanted Tad, trying in vain to catch his partner's eye. "Never was a bronc that never got rode," he finished the rime.

But Shorty did not see. Hank was shifting uneasily in his rawhide-bottomed chair. He too, seemed to be trying to convey a silent message of some sort to Shorty.

"But, ma'am, I——"

"Ma, ain't them biscuits a burnin'?" Hank was sniffing the air like a hound scenting a fox. Ma, her thoughts diverted to the bread, made her way hastily to the kitchen.

Hank's hand darted to the cupboard and the bottle of whisky came forth once more. This time it went the rounds. Hank replaced the cork and the bottle vanished behind the curtain.

"Now, Ox," growled Shorty. "How come yuh lied about this here eye?"

"Miz Basset 'lowed that them as mixed up in saloon fights was mighty low-down sorter humans, *sabe?* Tuh keep yuh from bein' disgraced, I lied a mite about that black eye that miner hung on yuh."

"Ma is plumb sot ag'in' fightin'," added Hank. "I aimed tuh wise yuh up, but it kinda slipped my mind. Onct, when I gits tangled up in a nice quiet scrap and shows up with a swole up jaw, Ma kinda quarantined me off and I et, slept and subsisted, as the sayin' goes, in the blacksmith shop. One uh the boys toted my grub to me. Doggone, she was on the prod. She don't paw the earth ner beller loud ner bend no rollin' pins across a man's withers. No, sir. She jest swells up like a buck Injun, gits proud and haughty and kinda looks a feller over like he was lower than a sheep herder."

Shorty was not cheered by this bit of news. Ma Basset summoned them to breakfast at this juncture and the little puncher inwardly writhed with the burden of a guilty conscience. Pangs of hunger conquered, however, and he ate as heartily as Tad.

IV

"I AIN'T noways aimin' tuh be hollerin'," explained old Hank, spraying a sage bush with tobacco juice. "I jest want that you boys should know what kind of a skunk yo're workin' fer and how he's throwed the hooks to me."

Tad and Shorty, riding on either side of the cattle-man, nodded.

"Two years ago, come July fourth, my son, Pete, gits into a jam over a hoss that Black Jack is abusin' on the street in Alder Gulch. Black Jack pulls a gun. He's tanked up on Injun whisky and onery as ——, *sabe?* He hates the Pete boy anyhow, and comes a rearin' when Pete tells him tuh quit beatin' the hoss over the head.

"His bullet ketches Pete in the thigh and Pete limbers up his six-gun as he's a fallin'. Black Jack goes down with a .45 slug in his gun arm and the fight is over.

"But the Black Jack gent and Luther Fox is playin' of a deep game and they sets out tuh bust us. They has Pete throwed in jail and tried fer attempt tuh murder. They's a dozen LF pole cats that swears on the witness stand that Pete starts the fight and shoots fust. Pete, not havin' ary witness, is railroaded.

"Trials is expensive, boys. Pete's law sharp bleeds me fer all I kin scrape up. The price uh cattle is lower'n a rattler's belly and I'm bad crowded tuh git the coin. I borrys ten thousand dollars from the bank and gives my note, never thinkin' they'd sell the note tuh Luther Fox. I ain't wise tuh them throat-cuttin' tricks that's called good business by some.

"That fall finds me busted and in debt. I'm doin' business with Fox's bank, buyin' grub from Fox's store and the pore specimens uh cowpunchers that's workin' fer me is drawin' double wages from Fox and stealin' me blind. Up till then, Pete has bin runnin' the round-up and takin' care uh that end. He's made me and Ma take it easy like, sendin' us to Californy and Florida fer the winters and a babyin' us scan'lous thataway. Now we're throwed up ag'in' it onct more and we pitches in tuh do our dangdest.

"The day Pete is sentenced to twenty-five years at Deer Lodge, Ma takes the train fer Helena tuh see the governor and I comes back and starts the fall round-up with as sorry a crew as ever rode a good hoss tuh death. My range covers the country between the lone cottonwood and the Missouri River. Some eighty thousand acres and she's supposed tuh be fair stocked. Gents, it sounds scary when I tell it, and yuh kin believe it er not, but we works that range and we don't gather five hundred head uh steers. Somebody's beat us to it, understand, and I'm cleaned out complete!

"I ships the five hundred head which don't bring no kind of a price, pays off these hoss killers, and gits Joe Kipp tuh help me home with the *remuda* uh sore-backed hosses. Then me and Joe starts in fer tuh hunt them stolen cattle.

"There's old sign a plenty and when we cuts the main trail, we splits up and follers it into the bad lands. There's mebbe so a stretch uh rough, timbered brakes fer fifteen-twenty miles betwixt the open prairie and the river. Timbered some and stood on end fer the most part. I follers a trail along a timbered ridge while Joe takes the main trail which seems tuh twist eastward towards the LF range.

"I've rode mebbe so eight-ten miles when my hat gits knocked off and I hears the pop of a 30-30. Some gent has drilled my hat. Over behind some boulders is a puff of white smoke. The range is upwards uh five hundred yards. I picks up my hat, unlimbers ole "meat-in-the-pot" and heads fer Mister Bushwhacker.

"*Ping!* Off goes my hat onct more and this time the shot comes from the other side, a good four hundred yards away. Whoever is doin' that shootin' is —— good shots. Thinkin' along them lines, and wonderin' where the next bullet will hit, I jabs home the spurs and goes a shootin' towards Mister Polecat behind the boulders.

"*Wham!* A Winchester barks and my hoss piles up, shot between the eyes. I takes my stand behind his carcass and throws some lead in the direction uh the brush patch where I sees the white smoke fadin' away. When my gun is empty, I commences shovin' fresh shells in the magazine. Then —— busts loose. Seems like a army is bombardin' me. But every danged bullet is goin' about a foot high. Sudden like, the shootin' quits.

"Got a plenty?" calls a stranger voice. "We bin foolin' up to now. The next shootin' we does will be the real article. Git on yore laigs and hit fer home."

"I feels the wind of a steel-jacket bullet as she misses my nose by about a inch. Mad? I was b'ilin', gents. Only fer leavin Ma a widder, I'd uh stayed till they got me. But het up as I was, I sees how plumb useless it is tuh make a fight, so I drags it.

"At the edge uh the bad lands, where we'd split up, I finds Joe Kipp. He's kinda white and shaky like, and he's afoot, the same as me. The drawed look around his mouth and the way his eyes looks at me, makes me feel plumb sorry fer him. He's takin' it wuss than I am.

" 'They shot yor hoss and made a danged target outa yuh, Joe?' I asks, not knowin' how else tuh ease his feelin's.

" 'Hank,' says he, solemn like and earnest as ——, 'I wish tuh —— they'd uh killed me, instead uh wingin' me, like they did.'

"And he shows me his gun arm, busted between the shoulder and elbow by a soft-nosed bullet. I ties up the arm the best I kin and we commences that thirty-mile walk home. Ol' Joe never whimpered onct durin' that night's walk, though I knowed he was sufferin' bad. Ner did he do ary talkin'. Up till then he'd bin right hopeful about gittin' them stolen cattle back. But bein' set afoot and sech musta drug it outa him bad, fer he ain't never bin the same man since.

"There's them that claims he's scared uh Fox, and sometimes it shore looks like they done read the sign right. Me, I don't know. Seems like, if he was scared uh Fox, that he'd throw up his tail and quit. But he still holds the job down. Some day, I look fer him tuh kill Fox er git killed a-tryin'."

"Didn't yuh never make no more fight tuh find them cattle?" asked Tad after some silence.

"Kipp done went down into the hills two-three times. Each time he went there, he come back afoot, lookin' like he'd seen a ghost. And somewhere in his hide 'ud be a bullet hole. Not bad, jest a kinda souvenir uh the occasion, as the feller says.

"Onct, I gathers me a posse uh cow-men from around the county and we slips into the brakes after night. Injuns couldn't uh done it more quiet. We'd gone mebbe so five-six miles and was goin' single file down a steep trail that led into a canyon.

Sudden like, fifty feet ahead uh my hoss—I'm in the lead, sabe?—a match sputters. Before I kin unlimber my cannon, a heap uh brush blazes up. There we are, square in the light uh the blaze, the trail too narrer tuh turn around, with a dead drop uh two hundred feet on one side and a shale cliff on the other. On the trail behind us, afore we gits our senses good, another brush pile busts into flame."

" 'Do you idjits turn back from here er does we start a shootin'?' bellers a gent from the dark up above.

"It don't take no more'n a half-witted sheep herder tuh decide which to do. We tells this gent that we're turnin' back.

" 'Fifty feet down the trail,' says he, 'the trail widens. When the front fire goes out, ride over it to that place and turn. Ary man that passes that wide point, gits a free ticket tuh ——. Us boys is holed up here fer a spell and we ain't cravin' no visitors. The next man that rides into these brakes, don't see his happy home no more.' "

"That ended it, eh?" inquired Tad.

Hank nodded.

"I ain't never bin back there. What's the use? They got the bulge in that country. They kin set on a pinnacle and see every rider between the brakes and my place, if they got ary fieldglasses, which they likely has. The only way tuh git into the hills is along them trails and every danged trail is watched. Them cattle is like so many flies in a bottle and Fox's hand over the mouth tuh keep 'em in. The same crew uh gun fighters that keeps folks from goin' into the hills, keeps the cattle from driftin' out."

"Hmm," mused Tad aloud. "Regular hole-in-the wall proposition, ain't it? Yeah. How many trails leadin' into that section, Hank?"

"Two," came the prompt reply. "It's a kinda pocket, widening out beyond where the brakes meets the bottom lands."

"Trails along the river bottoms, ain't there?"

"Nary trail 'ceptin' late in the fall when the water's low. It's what they call the Narrows. Except fer where trails has bin cut out, a man can't water his saddle hoss along the riverbank fer ten miles. Thirty and forty foot banks, *sabe?* And at each end uh the ten-mile stretch is a gorge cut out by spring rains and the cricks, which is so full uh quicksand that they'd bog a jacksnipe. A danged pocket, I tell yuh, a danged, gyp-water, soap-hole, shale-banked pocket. And they's feed in them cañons tuh winter half the cattle in Montana."

"Uh-huh. Yet, some way er another, Hank, it don't sound noways reasonable that a man can't git in there. Supposin' that a man was tuh cross the river, say at one uh the ferries, ride back on the opposite bank till he come opposite them Narrers, then swim across to where one uh them trails is cut in the bank?"

Hank laughed mirthlessly. "Can't be done, pardner. My boy Pete is the only human that ever done it and he crossed when the river was down. Now, at high water, the —— hisself couldn't make it."

"Yore Pete done it?" put in Shorty, silent up till now.

Hank smiled reminiscently.

"Pete knowed the river better'n ary human alive. As a kid, he used tuh kinda look after the hosses durin' the summer. He'd go into the pocket with a pack outfit and stay there till time fer the fall roundup. Long afore I even knowed he could swim, that kid was bustin' that river wide open, jest fer the fun of it. He like tuh drowned a dozen hosses, learnin' 'em the channel. I never knowed nobody else that ever swum the Missouri at the Narrows."

"Got ary uh them water hosses at the ranch, Hank?" Shorty's eyes were dancing excitedly.

"Shore thing, but even if you was fool enough tuh tackle it, Shorty, the river's up and boomin' now and the current swifter'n a blue-racer snake. I wouldn't let yuh tackle it, boy. ——'s bells, what 'ud yuh do if yuh did git across?"

"Now there's where yuh got me guessin'," grinned the little puncher, but that dancing light still flickered in his eyes as they rode on.

"If yo're figgerin' on playin' fish, runt, fergit it," grunted Tad as he licked the paper of a cigaret.

They rode on in silence for some time, heading back toward the Basset ranch.

"Hank," Tad broke a lengthy silence, "Did Kipp ever try tuh git help from the Stock Association on this deal?"

"If he did, he never said so ner nothin' ever come of it. Why?"

"I was jest a-askin', that's all," came the evasive reply. "Jest tryin' tuh git a squint at the lay from all sides. How long have yuh knowed Kipp?"

"Ever since he come to the country. Lemme see. About eighteen years, near as I kin figger."

"Where'd he come from?"

"Don't know as Joe ever said, and I never asked him. Look here, if yo're figgerin' that Joe Kipp is mixed up with Fox and ain't square, yo're plumb wrong. Joe's honest, bank on that. I'd bet my last steer on it."

"Mebbe so yuh done bet 'em already, and lost 'em," laughed Tad.

Hank smiled bitterly.

"I reckon not, Ladd. Does ol' Joe look like a crook er a cow thief tuh you?"

"No, Hank. If ever a man had honest eyes, it's Kipp. A right nice ol' feller from what me'n Shorty seen uh him. How long has this Fox pole cat bin clutterin' up the range around here?"

"Three years. He leased and bought all the range he could git holt of and throwed in some dogie stuff from the south. Black Jack come with the cattle. He's bin after my range ever since he come to these parts, but he never offered nowhere near a fair price. He told me, last time he made me a offer, that it was his top price and if I didn't take it, he'd bust me. It looks like he's shore doin' it, too. Him and that black-whiskered Injun."

"Is Black Jack a Injun?" asked Tad.

"Half-breed, so they claim. Apache, I reckon, by his looks. It wouldn't surprize me none if he's a outlaw. If he wasn't scared uh bein' recognized, why does he wear them whiskers? I asked Joe but he 'lowed a man couldn't arrest a man and shave him without havin' danged good reason, and I reckon he's right."

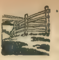
They rode on, each of the three busy with his own thoughts. Ma Basset was waiting for them at the corral. Beside her stood Joe Kipp. Both seemed unusually excited. Ma Basset's eyes showed signs of weeping.

"God help us and him, Hank!" she cried out as Hank dismounted, "Pete's escaped the pen!"

"Have they caught him yet?" asked Hank, his lips white with fear.

"He got clean away, Hank," said Kipp. "I rode over tuh tell yuh."

V



IF EVER a man looked worried, it was Joe Kipp. Every feature of his tanned face was drawn and haggard. His eyes were bloodshot and seared with some tortuous pain. His hands shook so that he spilled the tobacco he was pouring into a brown paper.

"Pete was a sorter trusty at Deer Lodge," he went on to explain. "He waited till the chance come, then made a clean getaway. He was gone two hours afore they found it out. I got orders tuh watch out fer him, Hank. Yuh see, they figger he'll be showin' up around these parts."

"Look here, Joe Kipp," said Ma Basset firmly, her eyes still wet, "I don't intend to sit by with my hands in my lap while you or any other man is gunnin' fer my Pete. Yo're a law officer and there's no way to keep yuh from hangin' around here, but I'm givin' yuh warnin' here and now that no man kin take Pete while I kin hold a gun."

She turned to her husband.

"Hank, I'm glad the boy's loose and a breathin' good clean air again. He ain't goin' back if I kin help it. Are you standin' by yore wife and son er do you line up on the side uh the law that sends innocent boys tuh prison? Are yuh——"

"Hush, Ma, yo're excited," interrupted Hank. "Uh course, I'm stayin' by Pete, right er wrong. But there's no need tuh——"

Ma Basset sent him a withering glance and whirled on the uncomfortable sheriff.

"If you was as eager tuh git back them stolen cattle as yuh are tuh shoot our Pete boy, we'd not be facin' poverty in our old age. It's a wonder tuh me that you got the nerve tuh show yore face on this ranch, Joe Kipp."

The sheriff winced as if struck. Shoulders sagging, eyes fixed on the ground, he made no reply. Tad and Shorty, unwilling spectators, were heartily wishing themselves elsewhere.

A mother cat will face a dog fifty times her size in defense of her young. Face him without fear. Men call it mother instinct and there is in this life no more courageous, more self-sacrificing, nor more beautiful trait. Not a man there but respected Ma Basset for the stand she took, Joe Kipp included.

"Ma'am," he said, his eyes still fixed on the ground, "I don't reckon I blame yuh none fer the way yuh feel. But yo're plumb wrong about me gunnin' fer Pete Basset. No matter how the play comes up. I ain't drawin' no gun on him if I should cut his trail. If I was as ornary as you figger I am, I'd uh kept my mouth shet and laid low till Pete showed up. My idee in ridin' over was tuh kinda let yuh know it in time tuh warn him. In doin' that I'm violatin' my oath uh office."

Kipp turned abruptly and swung into his saddle. Before Hank Basset or his wife could say a word, he had ridden through the pole gate and was lost to sight in the trees.

"I'd orter have my tongue cut out," said Ma Basset contritely. "Talkin' to the pore ol' feller thataway when he was doin' us a good turn. Hank, git on yore hoss and ketch him. Tell him I was jest a fool woman talkin' a lot uh fool nonsense."

Hank shook his head.

"I reckon ol' Joe savvys, Ma. He ain't holdin' no grudge. Supposin' we tackles some grub? It's past sundown and we kin talk this thing over better after we've took on a bait uh beef and beans."

He jerked the saddle off his horse and followed his wife to the house.

"Holler when supper's ready, Hank," Tad told him. "Me'n Shorty wants tuh tack a shoe on one of our hosses."

Hank nodded appreciatively. He knew that there was no horse to shoe and he thanked Tad with a look for the kindly lie that gave him and his wife a chance to discuss in private the escape of their son.

When Hank had gone in the house, Tad turned serious eyes on his partner.

"Shorty, I got a hunch that Joe Kipp's a worryin' over somethin' besides this Pete gent. He's sick inside as if he was gut shot and I aim tuh find out what's eatin' on him. Yuh seen how he flinched when Miz Basset lit on him?"

"Yuh don't think the ol' feller's playin' a double game do yuh, Tad?" Shorty's voice dropped to a whisper.

"I hate tuh be thinkin' he's that ornary, but dang me if there ain't some things about this deal that has me guessin'. I'm goin' tuh foller Kipp and see what comes uh it. Tell Hank and Miz Basset some durned lie er another about why I rode off. Look fer me when yuh see me ride through yonder gate, *sabe?* This may be a hour's job, er on the other hand, mebbe so it'll take a week."

"Why can't we both go?"

"Because, my well-meanin' but plumb onsenseless *amigo*, it's a one man job, this trailin' business. Stick around here, keep yore eyes peeled, and if the Pete boy shows up, tell him not tuh quit the flats till I show up and kin make a medicine talk with him. This deal has my curious bump a-itchin' and we'll see 'er through, no?"

"I'd tell a man. Taddie, ol' war hoss, I'm rearin' tuh tackle that river from yon side and——"

"Of all the plumb dehorned, knee-sprung, narrer-foreheaded idiots that ever dealt his pardner misery, yo're the wust! We ain't here tuh do no fightin', dang it. And I don't want tuh put in the rest uh the summer hangin' around them sand bars waitin' fer yore fool carcass tuh come floatin' along. Haze that fool idee plumb outa yore system and start all over on some plan that listens sensible.

"A man 'ud think yuh had more lives than a tom cat. Fork yore geldin' and come down the pasture with me while I ketches me my Yaller Hammer pony. And git this here idee circulatin' through yore system, son: We're peaceful cow hands, me and you. This ain't our scrap that's goin' on and the best we'll git is the sharp end uh the prod-pole if we cuts in heavy.

"Leave the thinkin' parts tuh yore pardner. If I hollers fer he'p, come a runnin' but not lessen I hollers. We want tuh be all in one piece and enjoyin' health and prosperity, as the sayin' goes, when we presses our ponies fer Arizony this fall. Keep yore tongue between yore jaws and yore gun in the scabbard and we stand a fair tuh middlin' show uh makin' our home range, come Christmas. Go rearin' and fightin' yore head and like as not we'll winter in a two by four hoosegow somewheres in Montana."

Ten minutes later, Shorty watched his partner ride his fresh horse out the pole gate and along the trail Kipp had taken. A wide grin spread across the little cow puncher's weather-tanned face.

"Yuh long-legged preacher," he muttered good humoredly. "Yo're plumb —— on givin' forth wise words, ain't yuh? Yuh give more danged advice than a Jersey cow gives milk. Then yuh rides away tuh hog all the fun whilst I hangs around the kitchen door like a dad-gummed blowfly and whittles sticks till yuh chooses tuh come back. Now I gotta go in there and lie tuh cover yore trail, dang yuh. We'll see about swimmin' that river, big 'un."

"Grub pile!" called Hank from the kitchen door, thus putting an end to Shorty's muttered tirade against the tyranny of his big partner.

A wicked look gleamed in his eyes as he made his way to the cabin.

"Where's yore partner?" asked Ma Basset.

"Gone," said Shorty, shaking his head sadly.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Tuh town, I reckon, ma'am. I done the best I could tuh stop him but 'twan't no use. Yuh see, Miz Basset, he's one uh these here habitual drunks. Goes fer months without tetchin' a drop. Then, sudden like, he jest busts out. He'll swim rivers, climb pinnacles, go afoot if he has tuh, till he locates licker. Then he bogs down till he's soaked up enough tuh kill ary ten men, forks his hoss and comes back. And the queer part of it is, he looks cold sober all the time. I bet a new hat yuh won't be able tuh tell he's had a drink when he gits back."

"Land sakes! The pore, diseased critter. Who'd uh thunk he was inflicted thataway, Hank? I hope he gits home safe."

Hank gave Shorty a suspicious look and when Ma Basset's broad back was turned, the little puncher winked broadly. Hank chuckled.

"Hank Basset!" Ma whirled at the sound. "Shame on yuh. Makin' fun uh that pore, diseased boy. If that ain't like a man. Cow punchers is the most cold-hearted humans livin', I do believe."

"Yes'm." agreed Hank. "Shorty, if yuh'd crave the use of a brush and comb, I'll herd yuh to it."

He led the way into the living room and to the bed room beyond. As he passed the cupboard, his hand slipped behind the curtain and when the two gained the bed room, Hank uncorked the bottle of snake bite cure.

"Happy days, Hank."

"Drink hearty, Shorty," came the reply, soft whispered, barely audible above the ensuing gurgling noise.

VI

WITH Shorty left behind to excuse his partner's absence at supper, Tad, despite gnawing pangs of hunger, made no complaint.

In the graying dusk of twilight, he rode slowly along the dusty trail, a solitary, graceful figure as he sat his horse with a careless ease, a cigaret drooping from the corner of his straight lips. Not a trace of weariness was perceptible, in spite of the fact that he had been in the saddle since dawn. He had the appearance of some cowpuncher bent on a careless mission and time was a minor factor. Yet his keen eyes constantly swept the rolling hills with a restless gaze. Always, that gaze came back to focus on the moving speck far ahead on the trail.

"Looks like he was headin' straight fer town, Yaller Hammer," he said softly to the twitching, dun colored ears of his horse. "Mebbeso I'm havin' this here ride fer nothin', I dunno."

From his chaps pocket he produced a weatherbeaten square of plug tobacco, gnawed to a ragged edge at one end. He surveyed it critically, wiped it carefully on the sleeve of his jumper and bit off a generous piece.

"Nothin' like chawin' tuh keep down the hungry feelin's," he mused aloud. "Ain't smelt grub since daylight. Mebbeso won't sniff none till mornin', neither. It's —— but it's honest, pony, if yuh want tuh figger it thataway."

Darkness slowly gathered and Tad and Yellow Hammer closed the gap that separated them from Joe Kipp. Tad grinned his thanks to the full moon that rose majestically from beyond the skyline.

He rode more alertly now, eyes and ears strained to catch any sign of the man he followed. Also, he watched the wagging ears of his horse. When those furry points stiffened, pointed forward, Tad would halt. Twice, when he thus stopped, he was rewarded by the sounds of a traveling horse, ahead on the trail. Once, Kipp's horse had nickered and Tad's big hands closed over Yellow Hammer's black muzzle just in time to prevent an answering nicker. He allowed Kipp a bigger lead from that point on.

The hours dragged. Tad dared not

risk lighting a cigaret now. The plug of tobacco was gradually being gnawed to smaller size. Then, silhouetted against the skyline, showed the lone cottonwood that marked Hank Basset's border line. Tad could make out the form of a horseman, halted beneath the wide branches. The waiting man lighted a cigaret and Tad recognized the features of Joe Kipp.

Nodding sagely to himself, Tad dismounted and led Yellow Hammer into the tall greasewood.

"Hate tuh treat yuh so or'nary," he whispered as he slipped a burlap sack across Yellow Hammer's muzzle and fastened it to the cheek bands of his bridle, "but I jest can't have yuh makin' no hoss howdy's, *sabe?* This ain't the fust time I've cluttered yuh up with one uh these contraptions, so don't act spooky. That's the good hoss. I wisht Shorty had half yore sense, dang his or'nary li'l' hide. I bet he's in the saddle this minute, streakin' it fer the river. Playin' hookey like a school kid and worryin' a man plumb ga'nt."

With the caution of an Indian, Tad, devoid of spurs and chaps which were hung to his saddle horn, crept through the brush toward the cottonwood. Two horses stood beneath the lone tree now. The glowing ash of two cigarets showed where the dismounted horsemen squatted against the wide tree trunk.

A clear space separated the tree and the greasewood patch where Tad lay prone on the ground. A space wide enough to prevent him making out the words of the low-toned conversation. Only when the voices momentarily laid stress on some spoken thought, could he make anything of the murmur. The voice of Kipp was clearly recognizable. The other speaker's voice was vaguely familiar.

"I tell yuh," came Kipp's voice, raised with emotion, "I've come to the breakin' point! I've stood it till I can't stand it no longer. Why, in ——'s name, can't you and Fox let me quit and pull outa the country? I tell yuh now, I can't be crowded no more. I'll tell the whole —— miser'ble story!"

"Like —— you will," came the sneering reply, low pitched, calm, distinct. "You'll play yore string out. When we clean up the Basset deal, you kin go. Not till then. We need yore protection."

Kipp's reply came in a hoarse whisper, indistinguishable to the listener hidden in the brush.

A coarse, jeering laugh came from the other man in reply. A match flared to light a cigaret and Tad recognized the black-bearded face of the half-breed, Black Jack.

"You know —— well you won't do no talkin'," came the breed's voice with cold conviction.

"Where's Fox?" asked Kipp, breaking a brief silence.

"Somewhere on the LF trail, headin' this way. And I don't aim that he should ketch me here, neither. I'm draggin' it for the Pocket."

Black Jack got to his feet and took a step toward his horse. Then he halted.

"Goin' to stay here all night? Better be gettin' to town where yuh belong. Fox'll be along directly and he'll wonder what brung you here. Pete Basset breakin' his stake rope has put the old gent in one —— of a humor, and he might treat yuh rough. Better hit the grit."

"I'm aimin' tuh wait fer Fox," replied Kipp hoarsely.

"Don't be a plumb —— fool. He'll mebbe kill yuh."

"Reckon not."

"It's yore funeral. I'm driftin'. Good luck. Mind what I say, now. Fox'll beat yuh to it, if yuh make ary gun play. That ol' ——'s a snake. So-long."

Tad listened to the thudding of hoofs as the breed rode away into the night. A few moments and all was silent as a grave yard.

Kipp got to his feet, pinching out the glowing ash of his cigaret. He led his horse to a patch of brush beyond the tree. When he returned, the pale rays of the moon fell on the blued-steel barrel of the Winchester in the crook of his arm.

Tad, watching the sheriff's every move, whistled noiselessly. He saw Kipp settle down behind a small patch of brush. This shelter hid Kipp from the trail but Tad could see him plainly, outlined against the pale sky. Came the clicking of the sheriff's carbine lever as he threw a cartridge from the magazine into the barrel. Then the gun raised and Tad saw Kipp squint along the barrel.

"Testin' his sights," mused Tad. "If ever a man went through the motions uh bushwhackin' a enemy, Kipp's a-doin' it now. He don't noways aim tuh give Fox a chanct."

Tad pondered this decision for some time, his eyes fixed on Kipp.

"——," he muttered inwardly. "Puts me in one —— of a mess. Fox needs killin' and needs it bad. Shore does. Even shootin' him from the brush is mebbeso what's comin' to him, I dunno. But that won't keep Kipp from bein' a low-down, bushwhackin' killer iffen he does the job. Looks tuh me like this Black Jack Injun and Fox is shore th'owin' the hooks to the ol' sheriff plumb scan'lous. They got him nigh loco, 'pears tuh me. But shore as he's a foot high, Kipp'll hate hisse'f fer pullin' the trigger, afore his gun barrel cools off. Yessir. Bound tuh. Then what'll he do? He'll go to the bad, complete. Booze'll put him in the bog fer keeps. Either that, er he'll turn that gun on hisse'f and blow his own head off. Which won't do nobody no good 'ceptin' mebbe this Black Jack skunk. Hmm. I never cut into no man's game up till now, but I'm shore declarin' myse'f in on this."

NOISELESSLY, he slipped back to his horse and swung into the saddle. As Yellow Hammer scuffed along the dusty trail at a running walk, Tad raised his voice in song to herald his coming. He rightly guessed that his approach would, for a few moments, so startle Kipp that the old sheriff would not have time to beat a retreat until Tad was too close.

"Sam Bass was born in Indiana, it was his native home,
And at the age of seventeen young Sam begun to roam.
Sam fust come to Texas, a cowboy fer to be,
A kinder hearted feller, you seldom ever see."

The words of the old range song came in full-toned, discordant abandon as Tad rode into the clearing.

From the brush, Kipp's horse nickered and this time Tad allowed Yellow Hammer to give answer.

"Whoa, geldin'," mumbled Tad, loud enough for Kipp to hear. "Looks like we got company. Halloo, pardner. Come out so's we kin read yore brand."

A second of silence, then Kipp stepped into sight. The sheriff's bushy white brows bristled in a frown of annoyance. Yet Tad was certain that the old fellow looked relieved. He eyed Tad with suspicion.

"He's wonderin' if I'm suspectin' him," was Tad's inward comment. Aloud he said with hearty pleasantness:

"Howdy, Sheriff. Yuh git bucked off er was yuh ketchin' some shut-eye?"

"Dozin' a spell," lied Kipp. "What brings you out this time uh night on this trail?"

Tad had not expected this question but his ready wit came to his rescue.

"Miz Basset 'lowed she'd acted plumb or'nary towards yuh and 'lowed that Hank should ride after yuh and bring yuh back. I knowed Hank was tuckered out and a-feelin' a heap upset about Pete, so I took the job off his hands. They want that I should bring yuh back."

This last statement came to the nimble-witted Tad as a happy after thought. If the sheriff returned with him, Fox would ride his homeward trail without being shot.

"No need uh me ridin' plumb back there, Ladd. I done told her and Hank I didn't bear no hard feelin's. I got business in Alder Gulch that should be tended to."

" 'Twon't do, Kipp. I give my word that I wouldn't come back till I brung you along. Don't make me go follerin' yuh around fer a week er so."

Tad's tone was that of light banter. Yet there lay an undercurrent of determination that did not escape the sheriff.

"All right, if there's no other way to it, let's git goin'."

He led his horse from the brush and mounted. Together, they headed back for the Basset ranch.

For some time, they rode in silence. Tad, from the shadow of his wide-brimmed hat, studied the sheriff's features. Kipp was staring fixedly at his saddle horn, deep in brooding thought. The reaction was setting in now and he was shaking like a man with palsy. Then this passed and the old sheriff's shoulders straightened.

"Ladd," he said abruptly. "You don't know it, but yuh saved my life tonight. I wisht I could tell yuh about it, but I can't. There'll come a day when I will, though. I come —— nigh doin' somethin' that would uh made life a livin' hell. I come nigh bein' a low down, or'nary coyote. I'm plumb obliged. I hope, some day, I kin pay yuh back in full."

"——, that's all right, Kipp. Fergit it. If I he'ped yuh ary way, I'm right glad tuh uh done it. Yuh know, there ain't none uh us humans that ain't got a or'nary streak hid out somewhere in our innards. And some time er another, that there or'nary streak jest nacherally busts all holts and comes a-rearin'. Sometimes, we kin grab a tail-holt and jerk 'er back in time. More often it's some other gent that heads off that or'nary streak and herds it back into our system tuh stay put fer the rest uh our life. I mind the night mine broke out."

Tad grinned into the sheriff's eyes, lighted a cigaret, and went on, the words coming lazily in his soft, southern drawl:

"My mammy died when I was little more'n a yearlin', leavin' me tuh grow up kinda keerless like, my daddy not payin' me much attention when I shows I kin kinda do my own rustlin'. He's a cowpuncher fer the Turkey Track at the time and I'm wranglin' hosses fer the spread. When they ships, I goes tuh town with the boys and while they're a-blowin' their coin fer licker and gamblin' and such, I'm squanderin' my ten a month fer sody pop and sweet truck. I've likewise bought myse'f a sore-backed, ringboned Mexican mule which I gits from a drunken Pisano fer six-bits and a pint uh rot-gut licker.

"My daddy, bein' a good drinkin' man and jest about slick enough at stud poker tuh hang and rattle all night afore he loses his taw to the tin-horns, ain't much better off, financial, as me.

"Then one fall night, in a Mex town along the Rio, my daddy gits downed in a gun scrap. I'm sleepin' on a poker table at the time, waitin' till paw goes broke so's I kin load him on his hoss and go tuh camp. By the time the smoke's cleared away and I gits full waked up, dad's a-passin' out fast and callin' fer me. I sets there on the *'dobe* floor and wipes the blood off his mouth while he crosses the Big Divide, a grin on his face while his eyes goes glassy.

" 'Kid,' says he, afore the blood chokes him, 'it was Pedro Sanchez, the bronc peeler, that done it. Here's my gun. When the time comes, git that greaser.'

"I'm some twelve years old then. That night I pads that mule uh mine with gunny sacks, throw's my dad's saddle on him and proceeds tuh foller this Sanchez gent who has left town *pronto* after the killin'. My ol' rusty Chihuahua spur is tied to my bare foot and the long-barreled .45 gouges my ribs and starts wearin' the hide off my hip bone. Thus burdened, as the sayin' goes, I hits the trail uh the gent that's downed my daddy."

Tad smiled reminiscently.

"Yuh found him?" asked Kipp, his own troubles momentarily forgotten.

"Ten years later, I finds him. He dealin' faro bank in Juarez and alongside him on the table lays a white-handled six-gun with five notches filed on the handle, plain and insultin' like. Sanchez, havin' got off to a good start, has done turned out tuh be a killer, *sabe?*

"Up to now, I bin as peaceful a kid as ever follered a long-horned steer. I've done got outa the notion, almost, uh shootin' up this greaser. I've done met up with fellers, as the years passes and I gits rings around my horns, that tells me as how paw was or'nary mean when he's lickered and the Sanchez gent has done no more than right when he's kills him off. I'm beginnin' tuh think that mebbeso I'm not bound and beholdin' tuh down this Sanchez after all. Right's right and wrongs no man, thinks I, and if paw had it comin', he done got it and jack-pot's played and won. So yuh see I ain't noways huntin' no trouble ner makin' no play tuh hunt down this greaser feller. It jest pops up sudden.

"There I stands, a awkward, long-legged, high-withered ol' kid, and I'm lookin' into the wickedest pair uh snake eyes that I ever seen. His lips is kinda smilin' but the smile don't go higher than his black mustache which is twisted to sharp points. Sudden like, I recollects a-holdin' of my daddy's head and wipin' that sickish lookin' pink froth from his mouth so's he kin talk. Somehow, my gun has got into my hand and I'm coverin' this snake-eyed killer.

" 'I come tuh kill yuh, Sanchez,' I says, and my voice sounds weak and unconvincin' as ——.

" 'So?' says Sanchez, laughin' short and nasty, like I'd sprung a josh on him. 'I wish yuh luck, sonny.' And with that he goes right on dealin' like he's clean fergot I'm there.

"If he'd a knocked the gun outa my hand, er slapped me alongside the jaw, I could uh waded in and done battle. But he's treatin' me like I was a yearlin' kid a-packin' of a pea gun. I feels my face go hot like I was settin' over a fire. My hands is cold as ice and bigger'n snowshoes. The barrel uh my gun is rattlin' on the edge uh the table, I'm that shaky. Wust of all, a kinda blurry look looms up in my eyes and I know it's tears. Man, it was jest nacherally ——!

"The crowd snickers and grins. A Mex *vaquero* makes a funny crack and his friends giggles. Sanchez, holdin' his head kinda sideways tuh keep the smoke uh his cigaret outa his eyes, goes on dealin' without lookin' up, payin' bets and rakin' in chips uh them that loses.

"Somehow, I makes it across to the door, dizzy and all sickish inside me like a kid that's swallered a chaw uh terbaccer. It ain't till I gits out into the dark and sets down on a empty beer keg, that I finds that I'm still holdin' my gun in my hand.

"Fust off, I starts tuh th'ow that —— gun as fur as I kin sling it. Then I gits a idee. I'm goin' tuh lay out there in the dark till this Sanchez comes out. Then I'll down him. I ketches myse'f talkin' out loud like a loco sheep herder and tears is runnin' like cricks down inside my shirt collar.

"I wipes off the tears, blows my nose and takes a chaw uh fine-cut tuh make me feel more like a man. Then, squattin' in the shadow near the door, I cocks my gun and waits fer Sanchez tuh come out fer his midnight lunch, which I knows most dealers does.

"Sudden like, there's a noise behind me. I swings around, startled sorter.

" 'Fer gosh sake, put up that cannon yuh got stuck in my belly,' says a good Texican American voice that don't sound none too old. 'She might go off, bein' cocked thataway. Ease 'er tuh half-cock and shove 'er back in yore jeans. Me'n you's gonna have a medicine talk, Slim.'

"I dunno yet why I done it, but I does as he says without a whimper. He leads me into a saloon down the street and orders two sody pops. I gits a good look at him in the light.

"He's a kinda runty built kid with a face that's plenty sprinkled with freckles like some cow has coughed bran in his face. He ain't much tuh look at till he grins, then he's right easy tuh stand. He's got one uh these grins that makes yuh grin right back afore yuh know it. His left eye is black and swole up and his lower lip is split bad. He's about twenty and a cowpuncher.

" 'My last two bits,' he 'lows, as he pays fer the sody pop. 'I bet that's two bits more than you got, long boy.'

"I admits the charge and he nods happy like.

" 'Then we starts even, feller. Down yore p'izen and loan me the use of a fresh chaw. Then I'm gonna take yuh back and watch yuh pull that Sanchez gent's fangs.'

" 'Yuh seen him bluff me down?' I asks, plumb ashamed.

" 'Yeah, I seen it. And I follered yuh outside. I seen yuh while yuh made up yore mind tuh shoot him from the dark.'

" 'How come yuh know I was layin' fer him?' says I.

" 'You was talkin' to yorese'f about it, pardner. All set? Then rattle yore hocks and we'll git goin'. They th'owed me outa that wigwam last evenin' after the poker dealer had robbed me uh two months pay.'

"Mebbeso it's because I'm cooled off, er mebby it's because this short-legged boy is so danged sure that I kin turn the trick, anyhow, when I goes back into that gamblin' house, I'm steady as a work ox.

" 'Whup him a plenty, Slim,' whispers my new pardner, as we steps inside. 'I'm standin' at yore back till yore belly caves in. I'll keep the gang off yuh. Whup him with yore hands.'

"Which I does. Sanchez goes fer his gun there on the table when he sees me comin' but he's slow and my bullet tears that fancy cannon loose from under his hand without hurtin' him, though it plumb ruins that white handle with the notches. He unlimbers a knife as I clears the table but I weans him away from it *pronto* when my gun barrel ketches him across the wrist. Then I hands my smoke pole to my new pardner and proceeds tuh work Mister Snake Eyes over with my hands."

Tad paused to light his cigaret. Kipp was again staring at his saddle horn.

"That fight wins me two things that night. One was Shorty Carroway, the gamest pardner a man ever had. The other was what book-learnt folks calls se'f-respect. Only fer Shorty, I'd uh killed that Sanchez from the dark that night and lost my right tuh call myse'f a man."

Kipp shot Tad a covert glance, laden with suspicion. Did the cow puncher suspect him of lying in wait for Fox? But Tad's homely features were guileless. They rode on in silence.

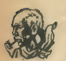
IN TELLING this story, Tad felt that he was accomplishing two purposes. He was perhaps giving the nerve-racked sheriff a new grip on his ebbing courage and self-control. Likewise, he was explaining to his own conscience, his reason for breaking one of the unwritten laws of the cow country. The law that says a man shall tend to his own affairs and leave the affairs of his fellow men strictly alone.

Kipp busied himself with a sack of tobacco and brown papers. In the gray light of dawn, Tad watched the gnarled fingers of the sheriff, pouring the flaky tobacco into the paper. Those fingers were steady now.

"Nigh sunup and yonder's the ranch. I'm ga'nt as a coyote," grinned the cow puncher.

"Kinda feel thataway myself, pardner," smiled Kipp. "Don't know when I've felt as hungry."

VII



SURPRIZE, consternation, and a trace of suspicion were written on Ma Basset's face when she greeted Tad and Kipp at the gate.

"There's—there's nothing wrong, Sheriff?" she cried, her work-reddened hands gripping the gate pole.

"Figgered you and Kipp 'ud want tuh talk over this here Pete business, so I done brung him back," Tad explained easily, wondering why Ma Basset looked at him so sharply.

Fresh in Ma Basset's memory was Shorty's fabrication regarding his partner's absence at supper the night before and she was searching the big puncher's rugged features for traces of his debauch.

Tad's eyes flitted to the log barn fifty feet away. He smiled faintly as he saw six inches of blued rifle barrel protruding between the chinks of the logs. The gun was covering Kipp who had not seen it.

"Any sign of Pete?" asked Ma nervously.

"Not nary, ma'am," returned Kipp. "I'd like fer tuh powwow some with Hank regardin' him and them cattle. Beginnin' this mornin', Miz Basset, I'm turnin' this here sheriff star over tuh Hank. Then I'm makin' a trip into the bad-lands. Iffen I comes out with them lost cattle I'll be askin' fer the badge. Iffen I don't bring them cattle out, I won't be needin' it no more nohow. As fer Pete, I ain't a-huntin' the boy ner would I lay a hand on him, was I tuh run acrost him. Until I come back from the Pocket, I'm a plain, every-day citizen."

Tad and Ma gazed at the old officer in startled surprize. Tad was smiling oddly. The rifle barrel slid out of sight in the barn and Hank Basset, holding the gun in the crook of his arm, stepped into sight.

"Howdy, Joe. I done heered yuh. What's the idee in actin' thataway?"

Kipp grinned.

"A feller done told me a story last night, Hank. I don't reckon he meant tuh, but he sorter showed me which trail tuh take, beginnin' here. I want that you should keep this here badge fer me fer a spell. After breakfast, I'll be askin' the loan of a fresh hoss."

"Land sakes!" gasped Ma, reminded of her duty to those who ride within one's gate. "Light and come to the house. There's flapjacks and steak that's sp'ilin' to be et."

Hank gazed thoughtfully for a moment at Kipp's badge, now lying in the palm of his hand. Then he pocketed the star and reached for the bridle reins of the two horses.

"Foller Ma to the house, Joe. Tad, will yuh lend me a hand fer a minute er so here at the barn?"

Kipp and his wife out of sight, Hank led Tad to the barn with an air of one who has news to impart.

"Where's Shorty?" asked Tad.

"Gone," came the cryptic reply. "He done left a message fer yuh. He said tuh tell yuh that you was a long-geared, psalm-singin' ol' sand-hill crane and that he'd learn yuh to leave him tuh tell yore lies fer yuh. Likewise that he was free, white and past votin' age and that he could take keer uh hisse'f in ary tight. Them's his exact words."

"Then the danged li'l' banty rooster is up tuh suthin'. What hoss did he ride?"

"Pete's Water Dog pony. He——"

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" groaned Tad. "I seen it in his eye, drat his pesky, speckled hide. I should uh tied him up afore I left. Ever since you said no man could swim that river, I seen that or'nary, contrary, mule-minded li'l' varmint a-millin' over a idee in his head. All yuh gotta do is tell that li'l' ol' son of a gun that no human kin do somethin' and he don't sleep easy ner swaller his grub right, till he makes yuh out a liar. I knowed it and when I pulled out last evenin', I was plumb skeered he'd do somethin' like that. If he's killed, Hank, I'm tuh blame. How long has he bin gone?"

"They pulled out two hours afore daylight," came the reluctant answer.

"They?"

"Pete went with him."

"Pete?" Tad's lips pursed in a silent whistle. "Tell me about it, Hank," he finished grimly.

"The boy showed up afore midnight. Seems like he'd got word somehow, while he was at Deer Lodge, that Fox was cleanin' me out. That's why he run away. He made me and Ma tell him the hull thing, how the cattle had bin run off and how Fox is aimin' tuh jerk the rope tight next week when that note falls due. Then he takes my gun and 'lows he's startin' then and there fer town. He's goin' tuh kill Fox like he'd kill a mad dog and Ma's tears ner my arguments don't stop him.

" 'Hold on a minute, Pete,' calls a voice from the door. There stands Shorty, grinnin' pleasant like. 'Put up that gun and listen fer a spell while we talks sense. Killin' Fox won't git yuh nothin' but a hangin' bee. But you and me, barrin' accidents and good shootin' on the part uh the LF polecats, kin git them cattle back. Say we throws our hulls on yore top-water hosses, swims that crick and kinda give them gents a su'prize party?' "

Hank's hands went out in a jesture of helplessness. Tad nodded understandingly.

"Shorty's jest plumb fool enough tuh win out, too," he mused aloud.

"Pete 'lowed that the swimmin' was a cinch," admitted Hank. "But then, mebbeso he was jest lyin' tuh make me and Ma feel easy. Say, what's come over Joe Kipp? He acts plumb queer. Yuh don't reckon the ol' feller's losin' his mind, do yuh?"

"Noooo. Don't know as I'd go so fur as tuh say Kipp was gittin' weedy. Fact is, I think he's jest kinda pullin' hisse'f together. Yeah. Supposin' we eases ourselves over to the house, Hank? My belly's so empty that the chaw uh terbaccer I swallered tuh keep from goin' tuh sleep, is rattlin' around in my stummick like a bronc in a corral."

On the way to the cabin, Hank told Tad how Shorty had excused his partner's absence.

"The wust of it is, Tad, she believes it. Said I was a kinderd spirit and a whisky soak when I tries tuh explain' that Shorty was jest funnin'. I thought fer a minute that she was goin' tuh haze me into the blacksmith shop again, dang it."

Hank grinned twistedly.

"I'll wring that danged li'l' rooster's neck when I ketches him," grinned Tad.

"He 'lowed he was breakin' even fer that windy yuh told Ma about a hoss throwin' him and givin' him the black eye."

During breakfast, Tad caught Ma Basset's gaze fixed on him, and he felt his ears growing red. No doubt the woman thought that bringing Kipp back with him was some sort of drunken whim. Moreover, Kipp's odd behavior did much to convince Ma that the sheriff was also under the influence of liquor. Tad breathed a sigh of relief when they were safely back at the corral and Kipp had caught a fresh horse.

"I'd like tuh go along, Joe," said Hank. "Them's my cattle, yuh know and it's no more'n right that I should be goin'."

"It's a one-man job, Hank. There'll like as not be some powder burnt. Yuh don't want tuh leave no widder behind yuh. In case I don't come back, here's the combination to my safe."

He handed Hank a slip of paper on which were some penciled figures.

"In the safe is a sealed envelope addressed to you. It has some papers which will be uh use to yuh. But it ain't tuh be opened till I'm dead, savvy?"

Hank nodded, then looked at Tad.

"Reckon I'd best tell Joe about Pete?"

Tad pondered this a moment, then:

"Might as well. Can't do no harm, Hank."

"Pete's aimin' tuh swim the river from yon side uh the Narrers and come into the Pocket, Joe."

"——!" Kipp's eyes filled with pain. "He'll never make it, Hank. Even if he crosses, there's a man watching the trail from the river. He'll be killed, shore."

"Then I reckon I'll be goin' along with yuh, Kipp," said Tad. "Shorty went with Pete. If Shorty gits killed, all —— can't stop me till I downs every last man that's mixed up in this. All of them, *sabe?*"

Tad's eyes had gone hard as ice. The good-natured expression had given way to hard, grim lines.

"I reckon," said Kipp slowly, meeting Tad's gaze without flinching, "that I *sabe*, Ladd. That bein' the case, I want that you should come along with me."

They saddled in silence. Tadd slipped a

Winchester into the saddle scabbard and emptied a box of 30-40 shells into his pocket.

"I told Fox I'd meet him at the lone cottonwood to deliver those cattle, Hank," said Tad with a grimness that gave the statement the tone of a threat. "That'll be Sunday noon. I reckon you'll be there. So-long till then."

"Remember the paper in the safe," Kipp reminded Hank. "It'll explain a heap that I reckon yo're a big enough man tuh understand, Hank."

Without another word, Tad and Kipp rode away, leaving Hank standing in the gateway, scratching his head in a puzzled manner.

"Hank Basset," called Ma from the doorway, some time later. "Whatever in the world are yuh standin' there in the road fer? A person 'ud think you'd jest said good-by to yore last friend, a standin' around like a hoot owl with yore hat in yore hand, gawkin'."

"Last friend?" muttered Hank, as he turned to the house. "I don't know but what she done guessed it right. The hull danged business has got beyond me, dad gum it."

"If you bin hittin' that bottle," warned Ma, her voice firm with determination, "you'll put in the rest of the week at the blacksmith shop. I'll have no drunken rowdies set foot over my door sill."

Ten feet from the cabin, Hank halted. He saw Ma Basset holding the bottle of snake-bite medicine to the light. Memory of Shorty's healthy-sized drinks came to Hank's mind.

"A good three inches below my last mark," he heard his wife mutter. "I suspected as much."

With a groan, Hank turned and with dragging steps, entered the blacksmith shop.

"Beat her to it that time," he muttered, seating himself on a keg of horse shoes and biting off a corner of plug tobacco.

VIII

"AS WELL marked as a prize-winnin' white-face, and as quick actin' as a top-cuttin' hoss," was Shorty Carroway's mental summing up of young Pete Basset. "He'd orter act plumb purty in a scrap, be it six-gun er knock down and drag out."

Nor was Shorty far from being wrong in his estimation of his companion. Straight-featured, clean-limbed, his clear eyes honest and alight with the fire of unspoiled youth, the son of Hank Basset sat his horse with a careless grace that marked him a born horseman. Even college had left him unspoiled by the flattery and idolatry that is the unmaking of many a crack athlete.

"I don't much like the idea of you getting mixed up in this mess, Carroway," he said in a troubled tone. "It's really not your scrap, you know, and there's going to be some nasty battling before it's over. It sure is white of you, and darn few men would do what you're doing now, even friends of long standing. Hang it all, we're little more than strangers to you and it's not fair to——"

"Fergit it, Pete," grinned Shorty, reddening. "Strangers? I reckon not. There's some folks that I've knowed since I was hock high to a cotton-tail rabbit, that's more strangers tuh me than yore paw and mammy. They done took me and my Tad pardner into the house like we was kin folks. Dang it, I ain't et such grub since I was a yearlin'.

"Anyhow, my reasons fer takin' chips in this here game is sorter vary and sundry, as the feller says. Tad's bin abusin' me scan'lous and I aim tuh git even. That's one reason. Then, this here Fox *hombre* is nacherally goin' tuh rear up and fall over backward on hisse'f when we brings out this herd. Thirdly and mostly, I'm sp'ilin' tuh lay hands on this here gent which goes by the handle uh Black Jack, thereby completin' a job uh manhandlin' which I was forced tuh quit sudden like onct at the LF wagon.

"Again, I'm honin' fer tuh show yore daddy that there's one human besides his son which kin bust that Missouri wide open. All uh which, *amigo*, downs ary argument on yore part. Ain't it about time we was gittin' to that place acrost from the Narrers? We bin ridin' right along since we crossed on the ferry and she's nigh dark."

"We're about opposite the upper end now, Shorty. See that high-cut bank below the first little bend? That's her. That lighter brown strip is their trail where they water the stock. We're a smile above, rough figuring. That means we'll drift to that trail nicely, starting here. We'll angle it as much as we can. Current's swift and the channel lays full against the cut back on the other side.

"See that sharp pinnacle? Well that's the point we'll head for. It'll show plain against the sky when the moon rises. Barring undercurrents and snags, we stand a fighting chance of hitting it. If we don't, it's thumbs down for us. That cliff is ten miles to the lower end and not six inches toe-hold in the ten miles. I wish you wouldn't tackle it, pardner."

Shorty shook his head and, following Pete's actions, dismounted and unsaddled. Hobbles were adjusted and the two partook of a meager repast of jerky and canned tomatoes. Brush screened them from the opposite bank as they squatted beneath a big cottonwood and waited for darkness and a rising moon.

Already, the approaching danger was fast cementing a strong friendship between these two. As men will do on such occasions, they exchanged confidences, swapped stories and lighted their cigarets from the same match.

Pete's quick movements and the dancing light in his gray eyes betrayed the nervous tension within. Shorty showed not a trace of whatever emotion lay behind his soft-spoken banter. Though a scant ten years older than his companion, Shorty had been well tutored in the school of hard knocks. Like his partner, Tad, he was an orphan, range-reared and self reliant. The only living thing that he was afraid of was a woman. The more beautiful, the more fear she instilled in the heart of the little cowpuncher. Danger merely quickened his pulse as strong drink affects a man unused to it. Yet he masked his feelings as effectively as the seasoned gambler hides four aces. It was as if risking his life was an everyday occurrence, all in a day's work.

Twilight deepened into night and a white moon pushed itself over the ragged skyline. A horned owl *hoo-hooed* in the cottonwoods. The timid white-tail deer bedded down in their red willow thicket. Back in the brakes, a wolf gave voice to a long-drawn howl. A ripple showed on the smooth surface of the water as a muskrat swam from its hole in the clay bank. *Plunk!* A beaver tail slapped the water with such abruptness that Shorty's hand dropped to his gun.

"I reckon we might as well tackle it," said Pete quietly, getting to his feet.

They saddled in silence, with great care. Cinches were left loose. Hackamores took the place of bridles. Boots and chaps were rolled in a neat bundle and tied to the backs of the saddles. Shorty bit off a large chew of plug and swung into the saddle.

"There's no way of keeping you from coming along, Shorty?"

"Not nary, Pete. I done hired out fer a tough hand and I plays my string out. Chaw?"

He held out the gnawed plug.

"Thanks, but I never chaw, pardner."

"Then don't never learn. I gotta own up though, that there's nothin' quite so plumb downright soothin' as a man-size hunk uh plug at a time like this. It's as intoxicatin' as a shot uh tea is to a ol' maid schoolmarm. Take the lead, pard. I'm follerin' clost behind. The sooner yuh starts, the better. These dad-gummed mosquiters is shore a-eatin' off me fierce."

Pete in the lead rode out on a sand bar and his horse waded out into the stream. The swift-flowing water swirled and eddied about the animal's legs.

"That high peak yonder, Shorty," he called softly as his horse hit swimming water.

"Right yuh are, Peter."

No further word was spoken. Shorty set his jaws as the swift current swept his horse downstream. Easily, he slipped from the saddle and with a hand holding to his horse's mane, swam alongside. The water was cool enough to freshen his tired nerves. He grinned to himself and jerked his hat down on his head with his free hand. Ahead of him he could see Pete and his horse. Both horses swam high in the water.

Suddenly, like a bobbing cork pulled by a string, Pete and his mount were sucked beneath the surface.

"Undercurrent," muttered Shorty as he filled his lungs with a deep breath of air.

Then he and his horse went under as if drawn by an invisible hand. In reality but a moment, yet it seemed an hour to the cowpuncher, and they again came to the top.

"All right?" called a voice from ahead.

"Settin' purty," he called back.

The horses were blowing softly with a rattling noise. Unexcited, swimming stoutly, they battled against the current. Shorty splashed water against the side of his horse's head to guide the animal a point downstream. Once more he was heading straight for the sharp point that loomed black against the sky.

A dark, misshapen object bobbed up ahead. It was a big tree, half submerged, floating down-stream. With swift, sure movements, Shorty swung his swimming horse to face straight up-stream against the current.

"Easy now, ol' hoss," he murmured soothingly. "Jest kinda mark time fer a minute till yon snag drifts on to St. Louis. That's the idee. Now she's gone."

And they were under way once more. Ahead, Pete was watching for snags and had worked his way back until he now clung to his horse's tail. Behind him, Shorty was doing the same. A scant hundred feet ahead the black shadow of the bank rose ominously. Pete scanned the unbroken shadow for a trace of the trail.

Momentary panic clutched Pete. Where the trail should be, only a perpendicular wall showed. Either he was above or below the trail that meant escape from the treacherous river. Then the panic passed, giving way to dogged, unyielding determination. He dared not call out to his companion for fear of being overheard by the men they sought. He swung his horse to breast the current and waited for the coming of Shorty.

A moment and the little puncher was alongside, careful to keep his distance lest the horses paw each other. The animals were breathing hard now. It had been a desperately hard swim. How long their strength and courage would hold out was a problem that might easily mean death to men and beasts.

"Missed 'er," whispered Pete hoarsely. "We got to chance it down-stream, I reckon."

Swimming squarely against the current, their horses had been losing ground slowly. Shorty nodded and, gripping his floating saddle strings, pulled himself alongside the neck of his horse. He deftly slipped free his rope strap and flipped the end of his lariat to Pete. Pete caught it and with a nod, slipped the end under his armpits and knotted it. Shorty passed his loop over his head and under his arms, then drew it tight. Now, if one of them should find footing along that treacherous bank, he could save his companion. On the other hand, if one of them went under, the other would meet the same fate.

"Both or neither," explained Shorty in a grim whisper, then swung his horse down-stream. "Here goes nothin'."

Two pairs off bloodshot, straining eyes swept the bank that slipped past so swiftly. Shorty now was in the lead, Pete ten feet behind, the slack of the rope coiled in his hand to keep from tangling. Both men were taking it with deadly calm as they fought their battle against the death that lurked in the muddy, swirling water.

Suddenly Shorty's horse ceased swimming. The animal's legs were swept down-stream and he floated.

"Gone belly-up, Pete," Shorty grunted.

"Look out!" called Pete in a hoarse whisper, as his horse lunged forward in the water in an effort to climb on top of the floating horse.

Now indeed, the situation was critical. Shorty ducked beneath the striking forefeet of Pete's horse and with every ounce of his strength, jerked at his hackamore rope. Pete did likewise. The mêlée of struggling horses and men drifted apart. To the left, a narrow ribbon of light cut the dark wall of the bank.

"The trail, thank ——," muttered Pete and, with a jerk that seemed to tear the ligaments in his arm, wrenched at the hackamore rope. An agonizing moment, then his horse lunged shoreward and found footing.

The weight of Shorty's horse, swimming once more, hindered the puncher greatly as he fought the current, his eyes fixed on that strip of light that meant safety. Loath to let loose his horse, he fought off the temptation to turn the animal loose. The horse was becoming panicky now, snorting and lunging, pawing at the man ahead of him in the water. Flinty, steel-shod hoofs broke the water a scant two feet behind Shorty's head.

Pete, in the saddle now, dallied the slack rope around his saddle horn. His stockinged heels pressed the heaving sides of his tired horse.

Back in the water, Shorty felt the rope beneath his arms go tight. Both his hands grasped the hackamore rope of his struggling horse. The noose beneath his arms tightened till it seemed to be cutting him in two. He clamped his jaws and gripped the hackamore rope. His arms seemed to be stretching until they loosened in the sockets. Seconds seemed eternity. Then he felt himself being dragged along the clay bank of the trail that led upward. He dimly saw his horse flounder ashore and stand with wide-spread legs and lowered head on the bank. With a grunt of utter relief he let go the hackamore rope.

"STICK 'em up!" bawled a hoarse voice from above.

A spurt of flame and the roar of a gun, then Pete's voice, trembling a bit.

"Got him, Shorty. Are you all right?"

A violent choking, gasping sound from Shorty and Pete, gun in hand, cast off the rope and, leaping to the ground, slid down the trail to his companion's side.

"Good gosh, man! What's wrong?" he whispered, loosening the rope and peering into Shorty's writhing features.

Shorty scrambled to his feet, reaching for his gun.

"My chaw. Swallered 'er. Let's go," he gasped, and lunged forward to throw himself upon a dark blot that moved along the bank.

The dull thud of a gun barrel sounded as it struck something.

"Your shot jest winged him, Pete. He's out fer a spell now. Gimme the rope and we'll hog-tie him. Then let's git outa here."

"Yo're covered, —— yuh!" called a hidden voice. "Plug 'em if they make a move, Bill. "Stick them —— hands in the air."

Two rapid shots cut the darkness and Shorty felt the air of a lead slug pass his cheek.

"Whupped!" he grunted and raised his hands. "I've laid down my hand, feller," he called. "Foller suit, Pete, they got us foul."

IX

A KILLER is, with mighty few exceptions, a killer because of his own desires. Black Jack, foreman for the LF, was no exception. He did not even, secretly or openly offer the plea that he was a victim of circumstance. He had killed men. He would kill more men. His past was a sealed book, his future a gamble and thus he met each day as it came. Making no prayer, he branded as weak any man who believed in a God. A half-breed, and the blend was dangerously bad for he had inherited the baser traits of both races.

Now, as he looked along the barrel of his Winchester to find Pete Basset at the end of it, his white teeth flashed in a smile that was unpleasant to see. The bushy black beard hid the cruel lines about his mouth, but the narrow slits of black that were his eyes, glittered as the moonlight struck them. A brown finger pressed the trigger, then paused uncertainly.

The taint in his mixed blood, thrown back to some breech-clouted ancestor, now stayed his hand. He hated Pete Basset and a bullet between the boy's eyes would be too mercifully quick an end. His trigger finger eased off.

Pete Basset, shocked and not a little disappointed at Shorty's easy surrender, hesitated uncertainly, gun lowered, making no move to raise his hands nor return the fire. He realized with a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach, that Black Jack and his men were well hidden and on higher ground that prevented a rush. He and Shorty, on the other hand, stood in plain view. Resistance meant death. Shorty had shown judgment, not a yellow streak. He dropped his gun and raised his hands.

Shorty, the lariat still in his hands, elevated his arms skyward and grinned weakly. The soft drip-drip of water from their soaked clothes on to the hard clay was the only sound that broke the quiet of the night.

Behind the willow clump, Black Jack lay aside his Winchester and drew his .45.

"The little 'un brung a rope, Bill," he announced in a jeering tone as he stepped into the open. "Mebbeso it'll come in right handy to string 'em up. Ketch ropes is scarce and hangin' a man spoils a rope fer use. Bad luck to use one that's snaked a man tuh ——."

Followed by another man, he stepped carefully down the incline.

"Howdy, Black Whiskers," said Shorty glibly. "When yuh go through my pockets after you've made a corpse outa me, yuh'll find four bits in my off flank pocket. Buy yorese'f a shave with it."

Holding his gun in careless readiness, Black Jack stepped closer, still on the incline. Shorty noticed that the single action gun was not cocked but that the breed's thumb was on the hammer.

"If yuh got ary more comical sayin's in yore system," he sneered, git shet of 'em. I understand as how hangin' kinda interferes with a man's voice. Bill, tie Basset up. I'll tend to this mouthy one."

Black Jack's hand slipped hipward and

produced a pair of steel handcuffs. He was clear of the incline now and on a level with Shorty, standing but a couple of feet distant.

"Jest lay aside yore hangin' rope, little man, and hold yore lily white paws out fer a nice pair uh bracelets."

Shorty's right hand flicked forward from the wrist with a deft, swift movement. The round noose shot out, settled, and tightened with such abruptness that Black Jack was caught off his guard. Shorty hurled himself backward, jerking the breed from his feet. The .45 exploded harmlessly.

Pete threw himself forward as Bill shot. The youth's hand clutched the gun on the ground and, rolling over with a catlike twist, he fired at the shadowy form that came through the air at him like a mountain lion springing on its prey. His shot missed Bill by inches and their bodies met in a thudding crash to writhe and twist in locked embrace.

Shorty's wet socks slipped on the water-soaked clay bank as he jerked the rope. Black Jack, the shining handcuffs now a nasty weapon, was upon him, the steel manacles crashing full into Shorty's face. A grunt of pain and the little puncher's hand gripped the black whiskers and jerked. His other fist swung at the man's jaw.

Again and again the steel cuffs clinked and clashed against the cowpuncher's face. They came away each time speckled with blood. Shorty, on his back underneath the breed, pulled the harder on the black whiskers and his free arm went around the sinewy brown neck. Muscles flexed and tightened like a steel-jawed trap and the blows from the handcuffs became less effective as Shorty slowly pulled the breed down to him.

Then, with a writhing, twisting movement used by professional wrestlers, the little puncher slid from under the other's bulk, still holding the black head in the crook of his arm. A short arm jab, vicious and effective, caught Black Jack's jaw, bringing a grunt of pain from the breed.

From the shelter of the high bank moved the man whom Shorty had knocked out with his gun. The man was crawling toward Shorty and Black Jack, his eyes on Shorty's gun that lay close by. His hand closed over the weapon and he sprang forward, his right arm dangling awkwardly at his side, the gun in his left hand.

Shorty saw him and with a terrific effort rolled over, dragging the striking, snarling half-breed with him. The wounded man, cursing methodically to fight off pain and dizziness, stumbled forward and flung himself on top the two. His gun thudded against Shorty's head. Once, twice, three times. Shorty's grip on the black-bearded head relaxed and he went limp, his bleeding, mangled features ghastly in the light of the white moon.

Pete and Bill, panting and fighting like wild beasts, fought without rules nor thought of fair tactics. Not a word passed their clamped jaws as they rolled to the water's edge and under the feet of Shorty's horse.

The horse, frightened, lashed out at the struggling forms. A shod hoof struck Bill in the ribs and with a groan, he relaxed his grip. Rolling free of the horse's flying hoofs, Pete staggered to his feet, aiming a kick at Bill's face. The stocking-clad heel caught Bill on the cheek. With a last effort, the outlaw clutched Pete's leg and wrapped his arms about it, jerking Pete off balance and bringing him to the ground.

Black Jack, his breath coming in sobbing gasps, had regained his feet. He saw Pete lurch to a sitting posture.

"Here!" called the wounded man and thrust the .45 into Black Jack's hand. "Finish the——!"

The half-breed jumped forward. The next instant the gun barrel crashed against Pete's head and the fight was over.

X

"LADD," said Joe Kipp, breaking a long silence that followed their departure from the Basset ranch, "how long was you at the lone cottonwood afore yuh let me see yuh?"

"Mebbeso half an hour, Kipp. I laid in the brush watchin' yuh."

"Figgered yuh must 'a' bin cold-trailin' me er you'd uh ketched up with me long afore yuh did. I'd kinda like tuh know jest how yuh figger me out."

"That's a hard question, pardner. Dang me if I kin read yore hand even when I've had a look at yore hole card. The sign all says that yo're playin' a double game. Yet I'd shore hate tuh think it."

"I'm obliged, Ladd. I hope tuh clear

some things up afore many hours. Supposin' I tell yuh that by comin' along with me now, yo're hinderin' instead uh helpin' things?"

"'Twouldn't keep me from comin', Kipp. Not when my Shorty pardner is mixed up in the deal. I aim tuh see it through, regardless."

Tad's tone and the look in his eyes forbade further argument.

"You heerd me and Black Jack talkin'?"

"Only some, when yuh raised yore voices. I heered enough tuh *sabe* that you was aimin' tuh lay fer Fox, that was about all."

"You got reason tuh want Fox killed. Yet yuh kept me from doin' it. Why?"

"Because, like I said, I knowed you wa'n't that sort uh man and it wouldn't he'p none tuh kill Fox from the brush. I reckon yo're goin' tuh clear up things if yuh kin and I'll lend a hand if the play comes up. I hope yuh come out winners, Kipp."

"Yet yuh won't trust me tuh go alone?"

"Not when Shorty's needin' me, no."

Again an uncomfortable silence fell over them, unbroken till they reached the edge of the bad-lands.

"There'll be a man on guard farther along this trail," said Kipp. "If I ride up alone, he'll let me pass. If you come along, there'll be shootin' and we'll lose a horse apiece and go back afoot. Will yuh trust me to go that far by myself? I'll signal yuh from that bald knoll when I've cleared the trail."

Tad pondered this for a long moment as he searched Kipp's eyes. Apparently satisfied with what he read in the older man's face, he nodded briefly.

"I'll wait half an hour, Kipp. Then I'll be comin', regardless uh ary signal. Them that tries tuh stop me will find they got a game."

Kipp nodded and, leaving Tad squatted on the ground rolling a cigaret, rode on.

Tad consulted a battered silver-cased watch and shoved it back in his overall pocket. A squint at the sun told him that dusk was but an hour distant. Smoke curling lazily from his nostrils, he watched Kipp out of sight.

Despite Kipp's apparent duplicity, Tad liked the white-haired old man and felt certain that he was not being tricked. There had been an indefinable something in the sheriff's eyes that puzzled Tad. He felt certain that whatever hold Fox and Black Jack had on Kipp, it must be a terrible one. He knew that Kipp's momentary lapse of physical courage was a minor point. There was something far greater than any fear of physical pain that threatened the sheriff. Now Kipp was about to break that hold. What would be the outcome?

Thus pondering, Tad saw Kipp ride to the bare knoll and signal with his hat. Tad was on his feet and in the saddle before the hat quit waving. Across Tad's saddle pommel lay his Winchester, a shell in the barrel, the hammer at half-cock.

Kipp met him, smiling thinly.

"Where's the guard?" asked Tad.

"Gagged and hog-tied in the brush yonder. He quit easy when I threw down on him. We're safe now till we hit the river bottom. They only had one man on guard today. They bin brandin', so the gent told me. We'll take our time now. Dark'll come on quick here in the cañons and we'll slip into the Pocket afore they spot us."

"How many men down there?"

"Hard tuh tell. Mebbe three-four. Mebbe so a dozen. They drift in and out. If they bin brandin', like as not there'll be half a dozen."

Kipp led the way along the narrow trail that now led along the side of the shale cliff. Tad understood now why it required but one man to guard the trail. A single man could, by hiding behind the rimrock above, drop as many men as he had cartridges in his gun. If Kipp were bent on tricking him, now was his chance.

Tad felt a shiver pass along his spine, and glanced unesaily about him. Then he shifted his gun to cover Kipp, grimly determined to shoot if treachery showed in the shape any movement near the rimrock.

Kipp, turning in his saddle to address some remark, saw Tad's gun covering him. The faint smile on the old officer's lips could not hide the pain of humiliation in his eyes. Tad grinned uneasily but did not shift the position of his gun.

The sheriff faced forward once more, the remark he had been about to make unspoken. In the fading light, Tad gazed at the tufts of snow-hued hair beneath the battered hat. The shoulders beneath Kipp's faded jumper sagged as if beneath the weight of some great load.

"——," muttered Tad, and shifted his Winchester so that the weapon rested across his saddle, muzzle toward the cliff.

"I'll borry the use of a chaw if yuh got ary handy," he called.

In the pocket of his chaps was a plug, but he somehow felt ashamed of mistrusting Kipp and wanted the old fellow to know that he was no longer covered.

Kipp tossed him a piece of tobacco, noticing the while that Tad's Winchester now pointed in another direction. He grinned understandingly and they rode on down the steep trail.

Dark fell like a black blanket, to be followed by the pale moonlight. From the river bottom, miles below, the faint sound of shots echoed, reechoed, and died away, leaving a silence charged with a sinister foreboding that caused Tad Ladd's eyes to narrow dangerously.

"Can't we make better time down this —— trail, Kipp?" he growled. "I don't like them shots."

"Goin' faster might mean a fall, Ladd. The more haste, the less speed, right now. We can't do them boys much good if we gits crippled up."

Tad, boiling with impatience, realized the truth of Kipp's assertion. It seemed hours before the trail widened and they found themselves on level ground in the deep shadow of towering cottonwoods.

The bawling of a cow, hunting her calf. The distant crack of brush as a white-tail buck broke cover. The mournful call of a horned owl. Then silence.

"The corrals is nigh a mile from here," whispered Kipp. "The cabins lays beyond them a hundred yards. It might be wise fer me tuh go on alone. They know that Pete Basset broke out and there may be a man er two scattered along the trail. Two of us 'ud look queer. If I was tuh go on alone, I'd sorter spring ary traps they had set fer visitors, savvy, and not git shot. Trust me?"

"Them shots we heered, Kipp. I don't like tuh set here doin' nothin' while mebbeso Shorty's needin' me bad."

"If he was needin' yuh tuh help out ary gun scrap, there'd be more shots. If that shootin' was sign of a fight, the fight's done fit and won long ago. Best let me go on alone. Iffen I gits in a tight, I'll shoot and you kin come a foggin'. Gimme half a hour. Then come on keerful."

If Kipp was bent on leading him into a trap, thought Tad, he would have done so before they quit the narrow trail.

"I'll chance it, Sheriff," he replied.

Kipp nodded briefly and in a moment was lost to sight along the trail that faded into the tall trees.

The sheriff's horse made but little noise as it traveled along the trail. Minutes passed and his coming was not challenged. Then without warning, a sickening crash of breaking timber under the horse. Kipp and his mount dropped out of sight in the thinly covered pit. Snorting with fear, the horse went down, Kipp striving desperately to free himself from the falling animal. The sheriff's head struck something solid and he lost consciousness.

Two heavily armed men stepped from a clump of choke-cherry brush.

"I'm right glad that —— deadfall ketched somethin'," grinned one of them. "I shore sweat a plenty diggin' her. Wonder how this gent got past the guard."

"I ketched sight uh his face as he dropped in," growled the other. "It was Kipp. That's how-come he got down the trail without bein' drilled. Hope it didn't bust the hoss's leg."

"Ner Kipp's neck. Black Jack'll raise —— if he gits killed and a stranger gits put in the sheriff office. Fox'd have a shore tough time of it if a hard man was put in Kipp's place. Lower the ladder and we'll look over the damage."

"I'd give somethin' tuh know what they got on old Kipp," muttered the other as he lowered a ladder into the pit.

One of them went down the ladder. A moment later a match sputtered and lit up the inky blackness of the hole.

"Kipp's knocked out and the hoss is good as ever," he called in guarded tones. "Better shove down the gangplank so we kin lead the critter up."

A CLEATED plank runway was lowered and after some minutes of work the frightened horse was led to solid ground. Kipp, still unconscious and bleeding from a nasty scalp wound, was carried out.

"You lead his hoss. I'll pack him across my saddle."

Thus Joe Kipp was carried to the lighted cabin where Black Jack sat on the edge of a bunk smoking cigarets and taunting the two prisoners who were on the dirt floor, bound hand and foot, their backs against a log wall.

"Where'd yuh git him?" asked Black Jack.

"He rode into the pit."

Black Jack picked up a water bucket and threw the contents roughly into Kipp's face. The sheriff groaned and opened his eyes. The breed stooped and plucked the .45 from Kipp's scabbard, then resumed his seat on the bunk. Behind his half-closed eyes lay some nervous tension and his brows knitted in a scowl as he watched Kipp sputter and struggle to a sitting posture on the floor.

Shorty and Pete exchanged a quick look but made no sound. Both were disheveled and Shorty's face was swollen and caked with dried blood. Yet his eyes blazed defiantly and about his bruised lips played a sardonic smile. Pete, erect and defiant, strained cautiously at the ropes that bound his arms. Both the prisoners divided their glances between Black Jack and Kipp.

"Where's Fox?" snapped Black Jack.

"He ain't dead, if that's what yo're drivin' at," returned Kipp.

Black Jack seemed relieved at hearing this bit of news.

"Miss him?" he sneered. "Er lose yore guts at the last minute?"

"Neither." Kipp was gathering his addled wits. "How long have I bin knocked out?"

"Ten minutes, rough guessin'," grinned one of the men who had taken him from the pit.

Kipp, thinking of Tad, calculated swiftly. Fifteen minutes had passed since the two had parted. That meant that in fifteen minutes more, Tad would be riding along that trail into a similar trap perhaps.

"Got ary more uh them —— holes around here fer a man tuh fall into?" he growled, feeling gingerly of his head.

Black Jack laughed harshly.

"Nope. One's a-plenty, I reckon. How come yuh never lit no signal fire from the rimrock like yuh was told to?"

"Fergot."

Kipp felt somewhat relieved to learn that Tad would not be trapped as he had been.

"Fergot, eh?" Black Jack sneered. "Mebbe. Mebbe not. Looks tuh me like you was aimin' tuh sneak in and take a look around. You bin weakenin' fer some time. When I left yuh last night, you was doin' some nasty talkin'. 'Lowed you was through with me and Fox. By ——, I'll see about that! Afore yo're a hour older, I'll have yuh messed up so —— tight you won't never make a peep. See them two skunks settin' yonder? They're cashin' in their chips tonight, savvy? And yo're the gent tuh do the job. Then yuh kin go back to Hank Basset and be —— to yuh. Go back and tell him how yuh hung his son and the nosey runt of a would-be gunman that come in here with him! Tell Basset that. I'll learn yuh to lay down on me!"

The breed was literally shaking with rage now. His ugly lips twisted in a leering grin.

"I aimed tuh shoot them two and dump 'em in the river. Hangin' beats that all tuh ——, though. 'Specially with Sheriff Kipp tuh lead their hosses out from under 'em and leave 'em danglin' to a cottonwood limb."

"——!" said Kipp hoarsely, reading full well the cruel cunning in Black Jack's smoldering eyes. "You won't! If ary harm come to them two boys, you'll hang fer it. I'll hang with 'em afore I'll mix up in such a low-down murder. I told yuh I'd come to the place where I was quittin'. I meant what I said. I'm givin' you a chanct that you don't noways deserve. I'm givin' you twenty-four hours tuh quit the country. After that time, I'm goin' after yuh and by ——, I'll put yuh back in the pen where yuh belong."

Black Jack, calm again, sneered insultingly into the face of the sheriff.

"I reckon yo're drunk. Yo're fegettin' who you are, ain't yuh?"

"No," said Kipp evenly, "I ain't fergittin'. I've left papers behind me which tell the whole —— story. If I don't come back in twenty-four hours there'll be a hundred men in here to see what's become uh me and to wipe out as low-down nest uh snakes as ever lived. I never lied tuh you. I ain't lyin' now. I'm givin' you a fighting' chanct tuh make a getaway. Take it er leave it."

"You mean yo're double-crossin' me and Fox?" said Black Joe, his words falling slowly.

"I mean that I'm wipin' my slate clean afore I resigns as sheriff. Wipin' it clean, regardless uh what it costs. I'm givin' you a chanct tuh leave me and these two boys here and git out. Do yuh take it?"

Kipp's eyes were fixed on a battered alarm clock. The half hour was up. Tad would be starting. Even if he had a gun to fire a signal would only be putting Black Jack on guard. Tad would come cautiously. Fate would decide.

A calculating gleam flashed in the breed's eyes. Documentary evidence to a criminal is a dangerous weapon. Dead men may tell no tales, but a written statement is as a voice from beyond the grave.

"Looks like yuh hold all the winnin' cards this deal," he said flatly. "Yuh shore out-figgered Fox when yuh planted them papers in yore safe tuh cover yore trail. I suppose yore friend Hank Basset holds the combination."

It was a shrewd bit of calculating and Black Jack's acting was without fault. He was playing for the highest stakes a man may wager: Life and freedom. Never did a gambler play more shrewdly.

Kipp, physically and mentally worn to the breaking point, was caught off guard.

"Yes, and Hank's the man that'll see justice done. I——"

Black Jack's ugly laugh caught the sheriff up short. Too late, he realized the mistake he had made.

"Bill," ordered the breed quickly, "take a man and ketch the fastest mounts in the *remuda*. Ride tuh town and bust open that cracker-box safe. Bring all the papers that's in it. Tell Fox tuh play safe fer a spell. Tell him that Alder Gulch'll be needin' a new sheriff. Kipp's dead."

Bill and another man slipped outside and closed the door behind them. There now remained but two outlaws besides Black Jack. One of them was in a corner on a bunk, moaning from the pain of the broken arm Pete Basset had given him.

Where was Tad? That was the sole thought in Joe Kipp's mind now. The departure of Bill and the other man lessened the odds.

"Better hog-tie the blattin' old fool," suggested Black Jack a moment later to the man who squatted against the closed door, a .45 in his hand.

"Lemme roll a smoke first," requested Kipp, reaching for tobacco, hoping to delay things till Tad showed.

The man who had gotten to his feet hesitated.

"Tie him, I said. Smoke be ——"

Kipp leaped forward. A clubbed gun caught the old officer across the jaw, whirling him about. Another blow from the man's gun while Black Jack looked on in scowling approval. Kipp sank limply to the floor.

"Neat work. Now tie him afore he comes to. I'll learn him what happens tuh them that loses their guts in this game."

XI

"HALF a hour and nary a sign uh Kipp."

Tad shoved his watch back in his overall pocket and swung into the saddle. He mentally berated himself for letting Kipp out of his sight. Here on strange ground, on a dangerous mission, he had thrown away his only vantage when he allowed the sheriff to go on alone. Kipp had as much as admitted that he had been playing a crooked game. What was to keep him from adding one more misdeed to those of the past?

A shot from the brush, well aimed, and no one the wiser. These LF men were playing a desperate game for big stakes. They would not hesitate to kill a cowpuncher to gain their ends and avoid detection. Capture, for them, meant life imprisonment. Kipp admitted being on friendly terms with them. His every action showed plainly that this was not the sheriff's first trip into the Pocket.

With these annoying thoughts to bear him company, Tad rode on, rode with a .45 in his hand and his eyes scanning every blurred shadow beneath the cottonwoods. The big hand that held the gun did not shake. There was not a trace of fear nor weakening in the keen eyes that swept the trail ahead. He faced his future without flinching, with splendid disregard of the heavy odds against him.

Years before, Goliad and the Alamo had known such men. They came from that heroic stock that followed Moses Austin to the Brazos River. No braver men ever lined sights amid spattering bullets than these Texans. So, as his sires had faced their enemies, so now did this son of Texas ride his trail.

The ears of his horse twitched forward. The animal halted and Tad was on the ground, crouched in the animal's shadow. Ahead in the trail gaped the pit that had trapped Kipp. On the edge of the black hole lay a hat. Kipp's battered old felt.

A moment's cautious search proved the pit empty. Tad left his horse in the brush, removed his spurs and chaps, and, Winchester ready, slipped on afoot, avoiding the main trail as much as possible.

Voices and the creak of saddle leather. Tad crouched in the shadow to put the approaching riders against the skyline. He could hear them talking now. Bill and his companion, bound for town. They spoke in low tones, barely audible to the listener.

"Black Jack's carryin' this too —— far tuh suit me, Bill. I draws the line at murder, sheriffs especially. Once clear uh these bad-lands, I'm quittin' the flats. Kipp's plumb right, he's holdin' a paw full uh jokers, even if he dies a-holdin' 'em. No more breeds fer me. They're too danged cold-blooded. Wait a minute while I tighten my cinch. This hoss swells up like a poisoned pup when yuh saddle him."

The two halted but a few feet from where Tad crouched. One of them swung to the ground.

"Supposin' we skirt town complete, pardner?" suggested Bill. "If we warns Fox, we gotta go through with it er shoot it out with that buzzard. We know too danged much tuh be let run loose over the range. I ain't cravin' none tuh match myself with Luther Fox. He's lightnin' with a gun. Say we drifts east from the edge uh the Pocket?

"Let this spread hold the sack. Black Jack ner Fox wouldn't consider us if they was in a tight. That breed 'ud kill us the same as he aims tuh kill Kipp and Pete Basset and that short waddie. Say, them two kin shore scrap, mister. Only fer Slim a-lendin' a hand, me'n the Apache would uh bin whupped neat. My hat's off to 'em. Dang me if I don't hope they gits away."

"Fat chance. The Injun is comin' out in Black Jack. I wouldn't give two-bits Mex. fer their chances."

They moved on, leaving Tad grinning in the darkness. The thought of Shorty and the others being in danger but made the lanky puncher the more cool. He waited impatiently until the two riders were out of sight, then moved on at a swifter gait.

The lighted windows of the cabin showed ahead. Tad crept forward with the stealth of an Indian. A few moments and he was at one of the windows, peering inside the cabin.

Shorty, Pete, and Kipp sat side by side, propped against the wall, legs stretched out in front of them. Kipp's head sagged forward on his chest for he was still unconscious.

In spite of the bruised and blood-caked condition of his face, it was visibly apparent that Shorty's left cheek bulged with a huge wad of tobacco. Even as Tad looked, a brown stream shot forth from the bruised lips of the little puncher.

"Missed him, Pete," he grinned. "Gotta raise my sights. The range is plumb long and that spider's crawlin' kinda zig-zag like he was dodgin'. Bet another nickel on the next shot."

"Better put in the next few minutes sayin' yore prayers, *hombre*," said Black Jack, crossing to the stove to pour himself a cup of coffee. "A man as near the end uh the trail as you gents are, had orter be lookin' fer a shallow crossin'."

"Injun," said Shorty in his soft drawl, "when I'm cravin' ary advice, I'll ask fer it."

Another brown stream that barely missed the breed's boot.

"Owe yuh another nickel, Pete. That danged spider got plumb outa range. If yo're honin' tuh be of any he'p around here, Whiskers, herd that insect back this way."

Pete Basset, marveling at the little cow puncher's superb nerve, thrust aside his worries and smiled faintly. Even the guard at the door eyed Shorty with approval.

Slim, of the broken arm, groaned less loudly as he watched Shorty scan the dirt floor for another spider.

A queer lump rose in Tad's throat as he looked at Shorty's battered features and saw the split lips twist in a grin.

"The —— li'l' ol' game rooster," mused the big puncher, racking his brain for a plan of attack.

Kipp groaned feebly and opened his eyes. Black Jack, a cup of coffee in his left hand, leered into the sheriff's pain-shot eyes.

"Mebbe so that rap between the horns brung yuh around to some sense," he said, fixing Kipp with narrowed gaze. "Had ary change uh mind while yuh was asleep?"

"No."

"Yo're forcin' my hand, mind. I've gone too far tuh do any back-trailin' in this game and you know it. I'm killin' off these two gents because they know too much. They come a-huntin' trouble and they got it, a hull bellyful. I sent word tuh Fox that you'd be killed. That was a lie. I'm keepin' yuh here till that Basset deal is closed and I sell out tuh Fox. Then I'll turn yuh loose, and me'n these boys is driftin' to fresh range. I'm leavin' yuh to settle with Fox if yuh got the guts tuh go through with it. I'll be a long ways gone so yuh can't do me no harm, but you kin make it hot fer Luther."

Black Jack chuckled at the cleverness of his plan. He drained his coffee at a gulp.

"Want tuh be hung er shot, you two?" he asked the other two.

"Yonder comes another spider, Pete," said Shorty, ignoring Black Jack. "What's the odds I don't hit 'im?"

But a moment before, while Black Jack was talking to Kipp, Shorty had looked up at the window and square into the eyes of his partner. Yet he had given no sign that he had seen Tad, save that his left eyelid had dropped in a covert wink. He did not glance again at the window lest he betray Tad's presence. He guessed that Tad was alone and was waiting for the right moment to open the attack. Shorty felt sure that Black Jack would put up a fight, even if Tad's gun covered him. He had seen men of Black Jack's breed before.

Death, to the breed, would be preferable to capture. Slim could still use a gun and the guard would fight. The light would be shot out and Tad would not shoot into the darkened room lest he hit a friend. It was a situation that would require generalship.

"——, Black Jack," put in the guard. "Hangin's a lot uh bother. Let's knock 'em on the head and throw 'em in the river. If their carcasses wash ashore, there's no bullet holes in 'em and nobody tuh blame. They was drownded crossin' the river, savvy?"

"Mebbe yo're right. We'll pack 'em to the river like they are. Time enough tuh cut the ropes off 'em when we've got 'em knocked out. Slim, keep a eye on the sheriff while we're gone. I'll pack the little 'un."

Black Jack, his black eyes hard as flint, lips set in a thin line, stooped to lift Shorty.

A brown streak of tobacco juice shot out, catching the breed squarely in the eyes. With a howl of pain as the stinging nicotine blinded him, the outlaw leader sprang erect, hands to his eyes.

A shot, accompanied by tinkling glass. "Stick 'em up!" bawled Tad.

The man bending over Pete whirled, shooting from the hip at the window. Tad's shot caught the outlaw in the shoulder, spinning him about.

"Watch the jasper on the couch, Tad!" yelled Shorty, rolling across the floor in twisting flops and striking the legs of Black Jack, who was groping for the table where the lamp stood. Cursing in a monotone, his eyes blinded and hot with pain, the half breed fell across Shorty's form.

Tad, gun in hand, sprang through the doorway. Black Jack shot desperately at the least sound, and Tad felt the air of a passing bullet. Tad leaped forward, the high heel of his boot crunching the breed's gun hand into the dirt. The small bones cracked sickeningly and Black Jack cursed as he groped for the gun with his left hand.

A streak of fire from the bunk. Slim's bullet tore through the crown of Tad's hat. Tad's gun roared, tearing the .45 from Slim's hand.

"Both wings busted," snarled Slim, and followed the statement by a string of curses.

The other man was in a heap, whining and begging.

"Kill the yaller coyote," yelled Slim. "Kill the howling ——! Fight, you —— polecat!"

Tad was on top of Black Jack now, his long arms swinging like flails as the breed fought like a trapped cougar. A terrific swing and the breed went limp.

The powder smoke was stifling. Every man's ears rang from the roar of the big calibered six-shooters. Slim was shrieking curses and begging some one to kill the wounded outlaw who put up so tame a fight.

Tad cut Shorty's ropes first.

"Thanks, Ox," grinned the little puncher. "Gimme that rope and I'll tie that Injun. Where's yore men, big feller?"

"I come with Kipp. Quit a runnin' off at the head, runt, and tie up that black-muzzled skunk afore he comes alive and makes me kill 'im."

Pete and Kipp were quickly freed. They grinned their thanks and set to work silencing Slim and the other man.

"Pete," grinned the jubilant Shorty, "meet up with my ol' Tad pardner. Homelier'n a muley cow, but we can't all of us be han'some. Yuh done got here jest about time, feller. The Injun was kinda goin' on the notion that all good cow hands was dead 'uns and was rearin' tuh convert me'n Pete. I owes Peter twenty cents, Taddie. Bein' kinda nervous inside, I missed that —— spider every shot. I ain't so good as I used tuh be at——"

"Fer gosh sake, dry up, runt," grumbled Tad. "Yuh dad-gummed li'l locoed idjit. Snuk off on me and overmatched yorese'f, didn't yuh? I'd orter 'a' let yuh git yore needin's."

With a snort of disapproval, he turned to Kipp.

The sheriff had moved to the open doorway and was staring with thoughtful eyes into the night. He turned as Tad's hand rested on his shoulder. Together they stepped outside.

"That —— hole ketched me, Ladd. The fall knocked me out and they had me foul when I come to. I done my best, which was a —— of a pore showin'."

"No man kin do more'n his best, Joe. It's over now, let's fergit it."

Tad shoved out his hand, but Kipp shook his head.

"It ain't over fer me, Ladd. I got my work cut out fer me. When I've done that work, I'll shake hands if yo're still in the notion."

"Meanin' Fox and you locks horns?"

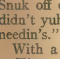
"Partly that. When we bring this herd up outa the brakes, Fox'll know that his game is lost. It'll be either run er shoot it out, and he ain't the runnin' kind. It'll be me er him, that's all. The range is too small tuh hold us both."

Tad nodded.

"I'm layin' my bets on you, Joe."

"I'm obliged, pardner."

They turned and entered the cabin.



THERE followed half an hour of cross-questioning the outlaw who had begged for mercy when he had been wounded. They learned that there were no more men to be accounted for. Tad told of the conversation he had overheard between Bill and his companion.

"Then we got clear trail ahead," said Kipp. "Bill'll pick up the gent at the rimrock, bein' they're sorter pardners. We might as well bed down and take it easy till mornin'. We'll take turns standin' guard. There'd orter be beds out under the trees so's them as ain't on guard kin rest. Come daylight, we'll take the herd out and I'll take the pris'ners tuh Hank's place."

This plan met with hearty approval. Not a man there but needed rest. Tad took first guard.

Black Jack, conscious now, had lapsed into a sullen silence. His black eyes were opaque, his bearded features expressionless. No amount of questioning could open his thin lips.

"That's the Injun in him," grinned Shorty as he and Pete followed Kipp outside in search of beds.

"My work is done, Sheriff," smiled Pete Basset when Shorty was out of earshot. "I'm giving myself up to you. I'm ready to go back to Deer Lodge."

"Better wait a day er so, Pete. I'm too danged busy tuh fool with yuh right now. Keep yor gun fer a spell. It may come in handy. Fox'll have men with him when we meet up with him at the lone cottonwood to pay off yore dad's note. This show ain't over. Till it is, yo're plumb free, savvy?"

"That's white of you, Sheriff. I've had a hunch for a long time that you were in cahoots with Fox and his gang. Black Jack's recent talk clinches that suspicion. Also, it's plain that you're breaking with the LF. I want you to know that I'm for you."

Beyond the cottonwood grove near the corrals, Shorty was jerking the saddle from his tired horse and staking the animal out where the grass was high. He sang as he worked:

"Parson, I'm a maverick, jest runnin' loose an' grazin',
 Eatin' where's the greenest grass and drinkin' where I choose;
Had tuh rustle in my youth an' never had no raisin';
 Wasn't never halter broke an' I ain't got much tuh lose;
Used tuh sleepin' in a sack an' livin' in a slicker;
 Church folks never branded me, I don't know as they tried,
Wisht you'd say a prayer fer me and try tuh make a dicker
 For the best they'll give me when I cross the Big Divide."

XII

AT MIDNIGHT Tad went outside to call Kipp for guard duty. He found the old officer sitting on a tarp-covered bed, smoking.

"Herd's a layin' peaceful, Joe. I done found a jug uh licker and Slim and the yaller 'un has drunk theirselves tuh sleep.

Black Jack's the fust breed I ever run acrost that don't tech t'rant'lar juice."

Kipp smiled absently and got to his feet Tad was pulling off his boots already. The sheriff's form was silhouetted against the lighted doorway for a moment, then the door closed.

Tad, in the act of pulling off a second tight-fitting boot, paused, his wide brow furrowed in thought. For as long as a minute he sat thus, Then he pulled the boot back on his foot and donned its mate. He listened for a moment to Shorty's snoring then, moving stealthily, Tad made his way to the cabin, crouching by the window, the glass of which had been broken earlier in the night.

"Hurry up and cut these ropes," Tad heard Black Jack command in a low-pitched tone.

"No," came Kipp's answer.

The sheriff's voice sounded tired, the voice of an old man who carried too heavy a burden.

"Yuh know what it means fer us both if I talk?"

"Yes. I've done figgered it all out. I'm takin' my medicine and givin' you yourn. There ain't no use talkin'. I'm goin' through with this. I aim tuh come clean with the hull story. How you killed a man when he ketched yuh stealin' hosses. How yuh got life fer it. How I filed the bars uh the window on that Los Cruces jail and staked yuh to a hoss tuh git away into Mexico. Yuh said you'd never bother me no more. I come north, changed my name and lets the past lay dead. Then you and this Fox hunts me out and makes me play yore dirty game. I'm tellin' all that when the time comes. They kin do what they —— please with me. I'll die in the pen knowin' I've squared my accounts here on this side uh the Big Divide."

The breed made no reply. Tad, peering through the logs where a bit of chinking had dropped out, saw the sheriff squatted with his back against the door, a Winchester across his knees.

Black Jack's back was toward Tad. He could see the brown, muscular hands, one of them swollen and discolored, twist at the tightly knotted rope.

"You'd bust the promise yuh made to a dyin' woman?"

"I've kept that promise," replied Kipp slowly, "more than kept it. I reckon you know that as well as I do."

"Yes," came the breed's answer, "I reckon I do. You done yore share and more. I aim tuh do mine."

One of those brown hands had so maneuvered that it had slipped inside the waistband of the overalls and was hidden. Unseen by Kipp, it now came forth, holding a tiny derringer. Before Tad grasped the import of the breed's intention, Black Jack had pressed the muzzles of the little double-barreled gun into his own back. A dull roar as the hammer fell and the soft-nosed .44 slug ripped its way upward through Black Jack's spine and into his chest. A second thudding roar. Then the smoking gun dropped to the floor.

Kipp was on his feet, staring strangely at the breed. Tad saw Black Jack's face twist upward, white teeth showing in a twisted grin.

"Yuh see I'm keepin' my word," said the breed through smiling lips. "I won't bother yuh no more. I'm—goin' now. So long."

The bearded head sagged forward. The body swayed sidewise. Kipp caught it and lowered him gently to the floor, dead.

Tad, entering the cabin, saw dimly outlined in the blue smoke haze Kipp squatting beside the body of the dead outlaw, staring into the glazing black eyes of the half-breed who had made the old sheriff's life a living hell.

Kipp looked up. Tad was amazed to see the sheriff's eyes wet with unshed tears.

"He was my son, Ladd," said Kipp simply.

Tad stared stupidly for a moment, stunned at the sheriff's words. Then he nodded understandingly. Slim and the other outlaw, stirred in their drunken slumber and slept on. Tad looked up to see Shorty, gun in hand, framed in the doorway.

"Black Jack done killed hisse'f, Shorty," Tad explained. "Pete awake?"

"Awake and on the way, Tad. Yonder he comes, limpin'. Bet he stepped on a cactus in his sock feet."

"I reckon Joe wants tuh be left alone, pard. Tell——"

"Hold on, Ladd," said Kipp quietly, rising. "Let Pete come. The time has come fer explainin' off a few things. Come in and set."

The three younger men, awed into respectful silence by Kipp's gravity, did as he asked.

"I won't take long, boys," Kipp began. "Ner will I try fer tuh git yore sympathy. Yonder lays my boy, the only child by a marriage that never should uh bin. She was Apache, I was a white man. We was both kids at the time and mistook lonesomeness fer love. We run off and was married down in Mexico.

"When she run off with me, she outlawed herself from her folks. They hated white men. I was —— fool enough tuh think I could make her over into a white woman. —— knows she was purty enough and as decent as ary white gal that ever lived. But in the towns, the white women shied off from her. Men called me a squawman and treated me as such. We wa'n't so happy as we might uh bin them days, and we stuck clost to the little cow ranch I had down on the border. Then the boy come and fer a while it looked like we was goin' tuh be happy onct more.

"But it didn't last long. I was gone a heap, round-ups and hoss huntin' and such. She was left alone on the ranch. There was a good lookin' Mexican that used tuh drop in sometimes. Fancy outfit and always shaved and wearin' of a clean shirt. He had money. I didn't know till later that he made it sellin' stolen hosses. She was a right purty little thing. I come in from a week's work in the hills tuh find her gone. She'd took the boy, then a kid ten years old, with her.

"I oiled my gun and hit their trail. But ——, they was plumb gone. I rode over half uh Mexico, then come home tuh find my cattle scattered and run off and nary hoss left. The Mexicans had stole me blind, durin' the twelve months I've bin gone. Travelers has tore down my corrals tuh build camp fires. A rattler strikes at me as I steps into the gutted cabin which I'd called home, and I'm that low in speerits that I goes back to my hoss without shootin' the snake's head off. Keepin' clear uh town er the ranches where I'm known, I quits that range fer keeps.

"Cowpunchin', ridin' grub-line, breakin' broncs, night-hawkin', even takin' a whirl at cookin', and I'm driftin' like a tumbleweed afore a norther. Doin' my share uh drinkin' and —— raisin' with the rest, aimin' tuh fergit that I got a wife an' kid a strayin' somewheres. But it ain't noways easy tuh fergit and I keeps driftin' back across the border hopin' tuh cut their trail and always I got a shell in my gun fer the greaser that's mavericked my wife an' kid.

"It's ten years from the day they run off from me, that I finds Mister Mex. I'm ridin' into a li'l' ol' Mex town when I hears shootin'. I rounds the corner uh the *adobe rurale* fort in time tuh see a *rurale* firin' squad blowin' the smoke from their carbines. In a heap against a 'dobe wall is my Mex, plumb full uh lead. They've done ketched him stealin' hosses. His pardner, a 'breed kid, has out rode 'em and got away after killin' three uh their men. That 'breed kid, understand, is my son.

"That night I finds my wife down in a stinkin', dirty *'dobe* shack in Gopher town. She's got fat and black lookin' and she's dyin' from pneumonia. I stays by her till she dies. The kid, a good lookin', black-eyed young tough, drifts in as she's goin' out. Not knowin' me, he stands there in the door a-coverin' me till she tells him he's linin' his sights on his own dad. He's there when I promises her to look after him and get him weaned off from his wild ways. He's laughin' at me and her when she closes her eyes and I feels her hand go limp in mine.

" 'We'll be startin' fer Arizona when we've buried yore mother,' I tells him.

" 'The —— we will,' he says, blowin' cigaret smoke in my face. 'You shore got a good imagination. Diggin' graves is outa my line uh work and yore ways is too tame fer me. I jest dropped in tuh git some ca'tridges and a bottle uh mescal. My father, eh? A —— of a father, you are. And —— yuh, don't go tryin' tuh reform me, *sabe?* Bury the squaw if yuh feel like it, then go back to where yuh belong.'

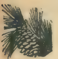
"He steps out into the dark and is gone. The next time I sees him, he's in jail at Los Cruces, bound fer Florence tuh serve a life sentence. I brings him some smokin' and pays off his law sharp and figgers I've done my best. But he gits under my hide about this here promise I done made his mother. He swears he'll quit the country complete and reform if I gits him loose. I weakens and that night I lets him out.

"I changes my name and drifts to Montana, aimin' tuh begin fresh and thinkin' the kid has gone tuh South America and made a clean start. Fifteen years passes and I'm sheriff here. Then him and Fox shows up. The kid's older now and his whiskers keeps me from recognizin' him.

"Me and Hank Basset rides into the brakes follerin' the sign uh the stolen cattle. We splits up. I gits my hoss shot out from under me and takes to the brush. I jumps this Black Jack sudden, shootin' the gun outa his hand. I'm puttin' the 'cuffs on him when he tells me who he is."

Kipp paused. His hands went out in a weary gesture.

"You kin guess the rest, boys. Fox and him a houndin' me. They tell me that the night uh the Los Cruces jail break, a deputy was killed. The kid shot him, like as not. Him er Fox who was in town at the time, dickerin' fer stolen hosses that the kid brung across the line. But they've laid the killin' on to me and I'm wanted down there. Likewise the kid plays on this promise I done made his mother, sayin' how I done wrong by her all the way through and if he'd had the right kind uh raisin' he'd uh turned out different. Mebbe so, by gittin' Fox and cleanin' up this gang, I kin make up a mite fer what or'nariness I've done. Then I'm goin' back tuh Los Cruces and let 'em do what they want with me. That's the hull —— story, boys. The story that's writ in black and white and lays in my safe. I want that you should know this afore I meets up with Fox."



OPENING the door, Joe Kipp stepped out into the night, his hair silvery white in the bright moonlight.

"I wonder," said Pete Basset, as if musing aloud, "what we can say to make him know we're for him?"

"Leave it tuh Tad," whispered Shorty. "He kin do 'er. Hop to it, Taddie. Do it and I'll give yuh them Chihuahua spurs yuh bin wantin'."

Tad gave his little partner a withering look, then stepped over to Black Jack's dead body, looking down into the upturned face. Then he jerked the blanket off the snoring Slim and covered the body of Joe Kipp's son.

"I wish you would say something to him, Tad," said Pete earnestly. "I'm afraid I'd make a mess of it."

"If I gotta, I gotta," replied Tad grimly. "Shed them spurs, runt."

Tad met Kipp at the corral. He held out his hand to the old sheriff.

Kipp's eyes were misty as he gripped it.

"That goes fer all of us," said Tad simply.

XIII

LUTHER FOX swung a long leg across his saddle horn and thus at ease in his saddle, gazed at the rudely lettered sign nailed to the lone cottonwood. A cold cigar jutted from the corner of his thin-lipped mouth. The age-yellowed ivory butt of a long-barreled .45 poked itself from beneath the long tail of his rusty black coat. He removed the cigar from between his crooked teeth and sprayed the sign with tobacco juice. One or two brown specks were added to the already badly spotted white expanse of shirt front.

"Barring —— and high water," he addressed his two roughly garbed, heavily armed companions who had dismounted and squatted on the ground, "that sign will come off that tree before sundown."

"No more dead-line between Basset's and the LF, eh, boss?"

Fox nodded. The corners of his mouth twitching. Then he pointed with the butt of a home-made quirt to a small dust cloud, slowly approaching from the direction of the Basset place.

"What do you make of it, boys? How many comin'?"

"Two. Two hossbackers. Nary steer."

"That'll be Basset and his sweet-tempered wife. We're due to receive a tongue lashing, boys. —— a man that can't do business without his —— cat of a woman tagging along. Killing's too good an end for such females."

"I wonder where's the cattle and them two waddies yuh hired, boss?"

"Quit the country, no doubt. I sent a man over here yesterday to see 'em. They'd pulled out and Basset was making no effort to gather the few head uh stuff he has on his range. As a matter of fact, Basset's wife had the old fool penned off in the blacksmith shop."

Fox smiled faintly. The two punchers laughed coarsely.

"Yuh aim tuh make a dicker fer the Basset iron, boss? Watch clost that ol' Hank don't sluff the ol' lady off on yuh along with the brand."

Hank and Ma Basset came on slowly, their horses scuffing up puffs of yellow dust.

The old couple looked tired and worried. Ma, dressed in bib overalls, flannel shirt, and an old slouch hat, filled her saddle to the point overflowing. Her eyes were a bit red as if from recent shedding of tears. Of the two, Hank looked the more downcast as they approached the lone tree that marked the boundary line. Low on Hank's thigh swung a .45 in a weather-stained holster. Across Ma's saddle pommel rested a sawed-off shotgun.

"Looky here, Hank Basset, perk up. I don't aim that Fox should see us down in the mouth. Land sakes, can't yuh scare up a grin of some description to wear on yore face. You don't see me sittin' my hoss like a dogie in a blizzard."

At that moment her horse, an old flea-bitten gray, stumbled and went to his knees, jolting the breath out of Ma as her saddle horn jabbed her. Hank did his best to hide a grin. Ma red-faced and gasping, gave him an angry look.

"If that ain't a cowpuncher for yuh! I do believe you'd laugh if I was to be killed by this crow-bait of a hoss. Now what's so comical? What yuh grinnin' at?"

"Yuh 'lowed I was tuh perk up, Ma. I'm perkin'."

Hank's hand, searching for tobacco, encountered Kipp's sheriff badge.

"Joe Kipp and the Ladd feller 'lowed they'd be here at noon to-day. The sun lacks half a hour uh throwin' the short shadder. We ain't licked yet."

"If ary harm had come to Pete, I'd feel it in my bones, Hank. What was it Joe Kipp said about that paper in his safe?"

"He 'lowed it 'ud be useful to us."

"Huh! He mighta said more. Yonder's Fox, lookin' fer all the world like a turkey buzzard, drat him. I'd like tuh give that old skinflint a piece uh my mind. Set up straight, can't yuh? Goodness, a person 'ud think you was a hunchback. If them new galluses is too tight, let 'em out a notch."

The couple approached the tree. Fox, his long leg still crooked across his saddle horn, lifted his hat with an air of mocking gallantry.

"The dried up ol' he school-marm," muttered Ma Basset, freezing him with a hard stare.

Fox's head, bare as a billiard ball, disappeared beneath the wide-brimmed black hat.

"I understood there was a bunch of cattle to be delivered here, Basset," he said as if surprized to see no herd. "My two boys are bringing them, perhaps?"

"Perhaps," snapped Ma Basset. " 'Tain't noon yet."

"On such a beautiful Sabbath morning, we mortals should forget our quarrels, Mrs. Basset. I come on an errand of peace. Ours should be a relationship of neighborly friendship instead on enmity."

His bony hand indicated Basset's sign.

"It is my wish that such things should not exist, madam. In my pocket is your note. I would gladly destroy that bit of paper and seal, in that manner, our bond of mutual friendship. In return, I ask for something that is of little value. Namely, the transfer of your iron into my name. It is evident that but a handful of cattle in that iron exist. I am offering to lift the burden of debt from you in return for a brand that has no value."

"*Why?*" snapped Ma Basset.

"That such ill feeling as is shown by yonder sign may be wiped away. You will be taken care of. Moreover, I shall myself make a plea to the governor of the State for an absolute pardon for your son. I wish to prove to you that Luther Fox is not the scoundrel you would have men think him to be."

His bony thumbs hooked in the armholes of his grease-spotted waistcoat, he attempted a yellow-fanged smile.

"A buzzard chatterin' like a magpie," was Ma Basset's audible comment to her husband.

Fox's yellow cheeks took on a pinkish hue. His eyes glittered venomously.

"We ain't askin' no compromise, Fox," said Hank. "The deal goes as she lays."

"So be it."

Fox bit off his words sharply. Pulling forth a huge watch, he held it in the palm of his hand.

"You have exactly twenty-eight minutes to produce those cattle, Basset."

"And that's a plenty, Luther Fox! Look yonder!" cried Ma Basset.

Out of a long draw came a moving mass of stock. The faint sound of bawling cattle came to them. The brownish spot widened quickly, taking form as the herd spread out across the prairie.

Fox went pasty white. The crooked smile on his thin lips vanished. A man seeing a ghost could look no more startled.

"Something's wrong as ——," he muttered as his leg swung to catch the ox-bow stirrup. Beads of moisture stood out on his cheeks. His claw-like fingers shook as they wrapped about the ivory butt of the low-hung .45. He gazed as if fascinated at the oncoming herd.

With those cattle came ruination and defeat. The absence of Kipp, Tad and Shorty was now accounted for. Somehow, they had gotten into the Pocket, killed or captured Black Jack and his men and were bringing out the stolen herd. The swift vision of a prison cell made him wince. He shut his eyes against it and his chin dropped to his chest. When he looked up a moment later, the color had come back into his lips. He turned to his two followers.

"You'll find fresh horses at the corral in town. It's a forty-hour ride to the Canadian line. You'd better lose no time."

The two men gazed at him for a moment, then whirled their horses and were gone in a cloud of dust, without a word of parting. Fox now turned to Hank Basset and his wife who acted like people who moved in a dream, stupefied. With steady hand, Fox brought forth Hank Basset's note and slowly tore it to bits. The scraps of paper fluttered to the ground.

"It would be better if you rode back towards your ranch, madam. I bid you good day."

Ma Basset hesitated, her eyes moving from Fox to her husband. Something in Fox's bearing silenced her usually ready tongue.

"Better drift, Ma," mumbled Hank.

She turned her horse and rode away. The old horse, headed on the homeward trail, voluntarily quickened his pace and she gave him rein.

Hank licked his dry lips and stared at Fox who had taken the .45 from its holster and was spinning the cylinder, his eyes on a solitary horseman who had quit the herd and was riding toward the lone tree.

"That will be Joe Kipp," said Fox, his voice flatly emotionless. "For a man who has spent his life in the saddle, he sits a horse badly."

The white-handled gun went back in its holster. Then Fox rode to the cottonwood and with an abrupt movement, jerked Hank Basset's sign from its place on the tree trunk.

"You'll have no further need of it, Basset, and the thing was an eyesore. The spelling was miserable. Should Kipp shoot better than he rides, bury me on the LF side of the tree."

Midway between the tree and the herd, Joe Kipp came on, his horse at a running walk. Fox, riding to meet him, halted for a moment to call over his shoulder to Hank.

"A man may be a scoundrel, Basset, but still not be a coward."

Then he rode on.

Those that watched saw the two men ride toward each other. Saw the gap between them lessen. Two puffs of white smoke appeared at precisely the same instant. Both men swayed drunkenly in the saddle. The horses, startled, leaped forward. The riders slipped to the ground to lie quietly, but ten feet apart.

Tad was the first to reach the spot. He swung from his saddle to bend over Kipp. Fox, a red smear oozing from the hole between his eyes, lay face upward, his gun still clutched in his lifeless hand.

"Is Kipp dead?" panted Shorty, riding up.

Tad looked up, shaking his head.

"Creased. He'll come to directly. Fox's bullet done parted his hair. The sun must'a' somehow sp'iled the buzzard's aim."

Hank rode up, panting as if from a hard run.

"Toss me Kipp's badge, Hank," called Tad. "He's done earned the right tuh wear it."

FROM Ma Basset's kitchen came the savory odor of roast turkey, baking pies and coffee.

In the front room, cotton covers had been removed from plush seated chairs and the place buzzed with conversation, generously punctuated by laughter. Holiday spirit prevailed.

Shorty Carroway, scrubbed, shaved, resplendent in a suit of store clothes, was gradually becoming more red of cheek due to the confines of a shining celluloid collar.

"That red tie uh yourn has slipped up under yore off ear, runt," confided Tad, also in holiday garb, in a voice that carried the length of the room.

Shorty rescued the truant tie and grinned wickedly.

"Is it the style tuh wear one sock draggin' low thataway when yuh got low water shoes on, Ox? Swap yuh this here Los Cruces letter uh Joe Kipp's fer Pete Basset's pardon paper. Dang me if I ever knowed so many big words could be herded together on one hunk uh paper. This judge gent in Los Cruces shore tells it scary. And them two reward checks fer Fox and Black Jack, man, they runs into real money. Joe 'lows the Black Jack reward goes tuh you."

"Fer gosh sake, dry up," muttered Tad. "Don't go sp'ilin' Joe's dinner, talkin' about the breed. Where'n —— yore manners? And mind yuh, act purty when Miz Basset sets yuh alongside thet school-marm at the table."

Shorty squirmed, his glance darting to an angular maiden lady across the room. Tad chuckled softly.

Joe Kipp, exonerated from the Los Cruces killing and recently returned from the border town, was in a corner with Pete Basset who had that morning made his triumphant return from Deer Lodge.

Ma Basset and the school teacher were fluttering about the room collecting vacant chairs and setting the table The school teacher, taking advantage of a lull in the operations, headed like a homing pigeon for the vacant place on the setee alongside Shorty. The little puncher grinned in a sickly fashion and swallowed hard.

"We'll have a chance to finish that thrilling tale of yours now, Mister Carroway," she cooed.

Shorty, catching Hank's eye, sent a look of desperate appeal that might have brought results had not Tad interfered.

"If there's anything Mister Carroway loves, it's relatin' them hair-brained escapes uh hisn. Git him tuh tell yuh about the time he stumbled over Lafe Tucker's tame polecat in the dark, ma'am."

Ma Basset, sensing Shorty's agonized frame of mind, came to the rescue.

"Hattie, if yuh don't mind, will yuh put on the red napkins. I'm gettin' that hefty that my feet kills me when I'm on 'em long."

She dropped into a chair and fanned herself with her apron.

Hattie reluctantly obeyed and Ma winked at Shorty. The little puncher grinned his thanks.

Hank Basset, who had been hovering in the vicinity of the cupboard where Ma's bottle of snake-bite cure was concealed, caught Joe Kipp's eye and a meaning glance was exchanged.

"Ma," said Hank, sniffing audibly, "ain't them biscuits burnin'?"

PLOWMEN PIONEERS

by S. Omar Barker

STRONG men have gone adventuring
  Since Adam saw the sword.
And some have died to serve a king,
  And some to serve the Lord;
And some to serve their own red blood
  That knew the wayward call
And answered it, and found it good,
  From Wrangel to Bengal.

And we have roused good songs for lads
  Who, whether young or old,
Have entered life's Olympiads
  Adventuring for gold.
So have we sung the sons of war;
  And so we sing them now.
But who has twanged a ballad for
  The heroes of the plow?

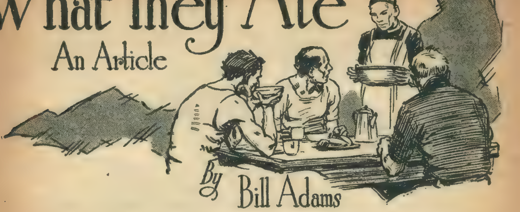
West over prairies, through strange hills,
  Calm pioneers fought on—
What? Was it gold that thewed their wills
  And led to Oregon?
Long muskets hooked beneath their arms—
  Afraid of none but God—
They carried plows to virgin farms;
  Lean soldiers of the sod.

These were the men who saw wild grass
  With creeping death astir;
Who fought red terror in the pass,
  And braved the massacre.
They loved the smell of virgin soil,
  The fertile feel of loam,
Yet mingled daring with their toil,
  And so, at last, came home.

Their furrows down the field of years
  Are straight and true and deep.
O simple plowmen pioneers,
  God rest you in your sleep!
And we who swell with lusty breath
  The ballads of the brave,
Will rouse a chant for noble death,
  And sing it o'er your grave!

What They Ate

An Article



By Bill Adams

Author of "Fenceless Meadows," "Old Sea Flower," etc.

HOW is your appetite?

I have been thinking of the good old days when I was younger. I often wonder what itwas that kept my soul and body together aboard the old *Fast and Furious*, when I was young, healthy and forever hungry. I sailed with her a full four years, and throughout that time saw no change in her menus when meal times came around.

When I was working for the Army Y.M.C.A. in camp I used to hear the soldiers grouse at the quality and at the quantity of the food served to them. Little they knew in what luxury they lived. I've seen men who would have fought for three stewed prunes! Men to whom the word prune would have spelt quite unbelievable delight and luxury.

Imagine having potatoes every day! Not only every day, but often two and three times a day. Think of fresh meat.

Well, it's all a matter of the point of view, I suppose; an affair of circumstance.

When with the old *Fast and Furious* I sat down each morning at sea to all the hard sea biscuit that I could eat—to that and nothing else; except black and sugarless coffee, with no milk in it.

At supper the feast was precisely similar save that the coffee was replaced by what was said to be tea.

As often as not the sea biscuit was so old, so stale, so moldering that it was full of weevils of all sizes. Since there was nothing else to eat we must perforce shake the weevils out and proceed with the biscuit.

When the hard tack was fresh it was so iron hard that to break it with the teeth was quite impossible. It was often too hard to break with a strong knife-handle.

What was it made of? Do not ask me. I do not know.

A biscuit soaked for a few seconds, or rather, dipped for a few seconds, in salt water and then placed in the galley oven would swell to several times its size. It was a custom to do this sometimes to make variety for supper, especially in fine weather; just as summertime fetches the shore folks out door to sip their afternoon tea and to nibble their cake and their cookies.

Thus treated, a ship's hard biscuit was known as a "midshipman's muffin." They were exceedingly unpleasant in their after effects.

When broken into small fragments and fried in the oven with a few precious scraps of pork fat—which was either saved at great sacrifice from the midday meal or begged from the China cook—they became known as "dandy funk" or "cracker hash," "dog'sbody," etc. I do not recall quite all the names of the queer messes that we contrived in our futile endeavor to vary our food.

On Sunday at sea we were allowed, as a great luxury, plum duff. On good ships this plum duff was made of flour and of raisins. On my ship it was made of hard tack beaten into a fine powder by a persevering Chinaman or negro, with a very,

very tiny allowance of flour then added and a few lonely raisins mixed with the mess. Like the midshipman's muffins, our plum duff was of bad after effects.

I recall a time when the Old Man gave the cook orders that we should all be served, for a change, "cracker hash"—the pork fat actually provided by the Old Man's generosity. Every one aboard was taken ill. The cracker hash was at once called off. I do not know what was the reason of the Old Man's sudden liberality or of our equally sudden sickness, but I suspect that there was some rather unusually bad salt pork aboard which it was necessary to finish, and which, in the eyes of a British shipowner, it would have been criminal to throw away.

Three times a week at noon we were given salt pork and pea soup. The pork was always boiled in the pea soup, to save fresh water, thereby making the soup so salt as to be all but undrinkable. The pork was but a couple of mouthfuls apiece. Often it was unfit for consumption. Ships leaving Liverpool, expecting to be away quite possibly for three years, would sail provisioned with the cheap food procurable in that port.

They would sail far, and slowly, crossing and recrossing the equator many times. They would voyage through all manner of climates and return. On returning to their home port there might be left a considerable amount of the old stores. Fresh stores would be loaded atop of that old stuff, which, when the ship was at last out from home long enough would by and by be uncovered and fetched out—and used as human food. I have seen—aye, and smelt—pork so rotten as to be nauseating. Moreover, I have eaten that same pork. Here I am.

Twice a week we were given salt horse—said to be beef. I daresay it was beef; but from ancient bulls indeed. If one could find a morsel that was neither bone, muscle or fat it was fairly good eating for a hunger-perished young man of round twenty years of age. On salt horse days we were given, in place of pea soup, bean soup. The bean soup was good, fine, excellent—or would have been had they left out a lot of the water and put in the beans. What beans one could find were very nice beans indeed—and must have been also very nourishing ones.

On the two remaining days we were served Fanny Adams.

What, you say, is Fanny Adams? No relation to me, I hope.

Fanny Adams was a strange, stringy mess that came out of tall, blue, corrugated cans. It was coiled up, rope fashion, and intertwined and twisted, like the wet hair of an oily, fat, black-complexioned woman who has been in swimming without having first washed the pomade from her locks. Fanny Adams was supposed to be canned beef, I believe; but I am a first-rate and simple-minded believer.

Why, you ask, the name?

Well, rumor has it that two ladies of the underworld were long ago mysteriously murdered in the port of Sydney. Their bodies were never found. Their names were Harriet Lane and Fanny Adams. Thus on some ships the canned meat is known as one and on other ships as the other—Harriet Lane and Fanny Adams.

EVERY Monday evening at sea an apprentice of each watch went aft to the cabin door and there was served out the week's supply of marmalade, or in cold latitudes of butter, for himself and his messmates. Also he received the weekly allowance of sugar.

The marmalade came from large corrugated cans, precisely similar to those in which Harriet and Fanny took their last long sleep. The butter, so called, came from similar containers.

To each apprentice, and to each sailor also, there was, when the allowance was portioned out, just a short half-pannikin of marmalade, sugar or butter. This was to last until the following Monday evening. Of course we always made one good meal a week—and that on Monday evening. Now and again a lad, usually with Scotch blood in his veins, would contrive to make his allowance eke out till perhaps Thursday or even Friday. I was always done by the end of Monday's supper.

On three days a week we were given, at noon, a minute "rooty" apiece—that is to say, a very small loaf of fresh bread. It was fair enough bread as far as it went: but it went only part way through one meal. That was on Tuesday, Thurday and Sunday.

Every day, at the noon meal, we were

each given a third of a pannikin of limejuice. This was served out as a scurvy preventive and was not served till we had been eleven days at sea. Usually, except in equatorial weather, we tossed it over the side or into the scupper. Now and then a boy would be found who liked it, and who drank the allowances of his shipmates as well as his own.

When, at noon, the food was brought forward from the galley, by the apprentice whose turn it was to fetch the food, for we took these things in turns, it fell to the oldest hand in the half-deck to whack out the grub.

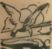
The oldest hand, who was not necessarily the eldest, but who had behind him the longest experience, would lean over the mess-kit and frown, knife or spoon in hand.

The ship with which I served my time carried eight apprentices in her half-deck—four in the mate's and four in the second mate's watch.

The three of us who were the oldest hand's juniors would peer into the mess-kit also, keen to see that in sharing out our poor allowance he made not the very slightest error in dividing the food into exact quarters. I have heard many savage quarrels over a twentieth part of an ounce of pork, or of plum duff, of marmalade or margarine. There is nothing like hunger to bring out the old original angry cave-bear in human beings. Many a bloody fist fight has been waged aboard the deck of a limejuice ship just because one apprentice thought that he was being robbed of his due share—a pitiful half-spoonful of coarse brown sugar, or a rooty not quite so large as that portioned to his neighbor.

This seems a shameful thing to write about; but the truth is very often a shameful thing, and all too seldom told. The blame surely lies at the door of, not the skippers of the old limejuice ships, who like ourselves were at the mercy of the owners, but at the door of the owners themselves, and of a government which permitted such starvation to exist in its merchant fleets.

Of course there were happy times, times when we were fed to the limit. I refer to, especially, Christmas day.



HOW well I recall my first Christmas at sea. We were running before a hard westerly wind toward the Horn, bound eastward, and she had a big press of sail set. She was booming along, the bit in her teeth, the ocean pastures songful all beside her, and the white clouds high above her fast mastheads.

For dinner on that great day we were served out all the boiled rice that we could eat, and not only rice, but boiled beans also. True there was no Spanish sauce or fancy dressing, but who, at sea, in a half-deck, cares for frills such as they? We ate to our hearts' content and had both rice and boiled beans to save for supper—supper, usually the poorest, the most hungry meal of all.

At supper we again ate to repletion. The ship was staggering a little, her sail almost too much for the wind that came after her quarters. After supper we were barely able to sit erect, so full of beans and rice were we. Those of us who were off duty lay in our bunks and thanked God for Christmas.

We recalled the old carol singing that we had known, so long ago, when we were younger, and sang verses of Christmas hymns, with grateful hearts and with very full bellies. We spoke of the beautiful things of shore—of the giving of gifts at Christmas; wondering should we, now that we were sailors, ever again be ashore at Christmas time.

The second mate came in to visit with us for a little while and told us how once he had sailed from home on Christmas Eve—on the very night when every shop and every window was bright with holly and with mistletoe, and hung with candles.

Ah, it's a hard life, the sailor's. The sea takes you whether you will or no, once you have become one of her kinfolk.

The four of us who were on duty kept looking out of the half-deck door, staring aloft to the royals, which stretched their white arches to the Cape Horn wind, wondering would it fall to our lot to have to go aloft and furl those far-up sails, with our stomachs now so filled with boiled rice and with beans.

That is, of my forty-four Christmases, one of the most memorable; though there have been many memorable ones among them.

The wind held fair, and strong, and we were left to our sailor's peace until eight bells was struck and all the crew swarmed out upon the deck for the mustering of the watches and the relieving of the wheel and the lookout.

Hard tack and moldy pork, scant plates of soup and rancid margarine, were all forgotten; for we were homeward bound and it was Christmas Day.

It doesn't take much of human kindness, of human cheer, to make a man forget his past miseries, and to make him freely forgive whatever of injustice he has endured. Thank Heaven for that; for, were it not so, this earth could not go on.

We, on those far away days, blamed our Old Man in that we were so ill fed, so shabbily treated; but we were young and judged with the quick impetuosity of youth. Those of us who lived long enough learned not to judge too hastily.

It was hard when, close to the equator, sweltering under a tropic sun, one came away from the wheel at noon to find nothing to eat but a scrap of salt pork and a piece of hard tack, with a small plate of salty pea soup. It was equally hard, when far south off the desolate cape, to go from a similar scant meal to stand for two or sometimes three hours at the wheel in a drive of snow, the hurricane blasting sea and sky and ship.

Those days are done. The day of the sailing ship is past. We who knew those days, those ships, look backward with amused memories; wishing we had the same days here to live again: for after all, hard though it was, life was good. We were often little but barbaric, fighting amongst ourselves over scanty allowances of food; jealous over a few spoonsful of soup, or of marmalade. We worked hard, with no thanks save the knowledge that our job was done.

We served the hardships of a hard nation—the limejuice ships of Britain. We saw an empire built upon the efforts of poor men's hungry bodies, held by the starved limbs of simple people. Yet we gave injustice but little thought and forgot our hunger when the pay days came; laughing together, ready for the next ship and the next voyage—the next adventure.

THE ANTI-WEAPON LAW OF CHARLES VI

by F. R. Buckley

THERE is nothing new under the sun; and even anti-weapon laws have been tried before—in 1382, for instance. A greedy and witless king of France, Charles VI, attempted to re-impose on the people of Paris what would now be called a sales-tax. The people of Paris arose in their might—armed, as it happened, with mallets. The insurrection was quickly put down by the disciplined forces; but, to prevent further troubles of the kind, a rigorous disarmament law was passed and very strictly enforced. Paris was regarded as the pivot of the kingdom; it must not be split by internal fighting; and obviously—to the feeble mind of Charles VI—fighting would be absolutely prevented by the removal of the inhabitants' weapons.

Time passed, about thirty years. A generation of Parisians arose which knew not weapons. Then, under circumstances it is not necessary to detail, a certain Duke of Burgundy wished to have command of the city. It was politically impossible for him to take it by force of arms; but it was possible, as it would be nowadays, for him to engineer the election of a friend of his to the captaincy of the city. Had all the inhabitants been armed, this move would have been without effect; a captain can only command; and to order the whole body of the citizenry to fight against its own interests would be useless.

But, under the circumstances, the Count de St. Pol's course was clear. One class of citizens had of necessity been exempted from the disarmament process—the butchers. The butchers had knives, axes and bludgeons galore—just as after a modern disarmament plumbers would still have lots of lead pipe, and miners plenty of dynamite. And one class of citizens can usually be induced to betray the other classes for its own benefit.

So the Duke of Burgundy controlled Paris, much against the desire of the Parisians at large, by means of a Parisian militia.

The powerful, but unarmed, University; and the indignant, but weaponless, population, protested violently But it has not been recorded anywhere that their protests ever did them any good.

El Carcel

A Complete Novelette

By

John Murray Reynolds

Author of "Medicinal Methods."

THE PLAZA of Santa Clara was filled with the rattle of rifle-fire, and the hot, motionless air was rank with the stench of smokeless powder. The little Caribbean seaport had seen more than one battle since the buccaneers first pounded the limestone walls of the harbor fort to powder with their muzzle-loading brass cannon and then sacked the town.

The twin gray towers of the old cathedral lost none of their air of drowsy repose. Don Miguel Beola and his friends might feel that swarthy *Presidente* Pelayo had fixed the last election and that it was their duty and privilege to resort to arms. All this meant nothing to the cathedral, which continued to dream of the past.

By a bold stroke the Beolistas had that morning managed to seize most of the city, but the simultaneous attempt to surprize the fort had failed. The federal garrison had since been reinforced by some troops rushed down from the capitol on a special train, and had driven the rebels out of the lower part of the city. They still clung stubbornly to everything south of the Avenida del Cuatro de Junio, which runs into the plaza and bisects the city.

The rattle of an old-fashioned machine-gun sounded at intervals, distinct amid the scattering rifle shots. This gun was emplaced in the *glorieta* or band-stand that stood beside the statue of Cristobal Colon in the center of the plaza, and was the trump card of the Beolistas in their slow retreat.

Richmond, the consul and young Stevens of the fruit company watched the fighting from the roof of the consulate. The rebels were firing from the roofs and windows. A dozen white-clad *soldados* of the federal forces showed where the last attempt to rush the band-stand fortress had failed.

The machine-gun was under the tender care of a young man with fiery hair who cursed the antiquated mechanism in mixed English and Gaelic while he tried to elevate the piece enough to reach the roof of the Casino Español across the way. The federal rifle fire seemed to slacken for a few minutes, and then the doors of the Casino suddenly opened and a close, packed mass of troops surged across the plaza. At that moment the machine-gun jammed, as is the way of machine-guns. Its operator poked at it furiously but futilely for a few seconds and then drew his revolver as three *soldados* simultaneously climbed the rail of the band-stand. He shot the first two, but the third stunned him with a gun stock, and the attacking wave rolled on toward the barricade.

"Well, I guess that settles their hash," said Richmond with a sigh, lowering his binoculars to rest his eyes for a while. "It seems too bad, in a way. Don Miguel isn't a bad *hombre* at all. At least he's better than Pelayo."

"Yes, they're in full retreat," replied

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Stevens nervously. "There is that chap on horseback again; he has managed to get together some sort of rear guard. I swear he looks like a girl!"

"It's not impossible," said Richmond thoughtfully. "I wonder——"

"That rear guard is putting up a —— good scrap," continued Stevens excitedly. "I swear I'd like to lend them a hand!"

"None of that, *chico!*" Richmond's voice was stern. "You're new in this fry pan of a country, and I feel sort of responsible for you. You're too —— romantic. Mind your own business and let this here war alone."

Only the stubborn rear guard kept the retreat from becoming a panic-stricken search for shelter, for numbers of the Beolistas deserted at every cross street, scurrying away to discard their arms and appear a little later as peaceable non-combatants. The hundred or so that remained when the edge of the town was reached found further retreat cut off, and barricaded themselves in a large house that stood by itself on a small rise. Coronel Perez commanding the garrison drew his lines close about the house and waited till one of the old Krupps from the fort could be brought to force the door.

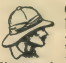
"That is Beloa's own house."

Richmond was using his binoculars again. "Big old place, I used to know it well. They're fools to stop there, though. They might hold it against infantry alone, but Perez will have a gun there pretty soon."

Intervening houses cut off much of the view, and all the watchers, perched on the roof of the consulate, could see was the upper part of the house where the revolution was rapidly passing into history. Occasional puffs of smoke drifted from upper windows, about three seconds elapsing before the sound of the shot came drifting to their ears. About half an hour later they heard the thrice repeated heavier note of a field piece, and smoke began to curl up between the roof tiles of the beleaguered house. The rifle fire ceased. The revolution was over.

As the firing died away Richmond and Stevens left the shelter of the consulate and headed for the Europa. Santa Clara was rapidly returning to its usual state of sleepy, contented quiet. Occasional bodies still lay sprawled here and there, and in some places the soft pastel colors of the house walls were slashed with gleaming white where a bullet had laid bare the limestone beneath the paint. Ragged urchins were gathering up the empty cartridge cases for playthings.

The stores were opening up again, and a corner *bodega*—combination grocery store and wine shop—was crowded with excited citizenry discussing the glorious victory just won by the beloved government. Some of those who were loudest in their rejoicing and most outspoken in their praise of the strategy of Coronel Perez had been in the rebel ranks earlier in the day.



OF THE two Americans walking by, Richmond was nearly twenty years the elder. He was long and lean and shriveled, his frayed tan linen suit wrapped itself around his bony frame like a wet sock on a stick. His skin had that curious combination of tan and sallowness that comes from weary years of tropic sun and dengue fever, but his eyes were still clear.

Young Stevens who walked beside him was fresh from the north, having only arrived in Santa Clara some ten days back. For him the tropics still held their charm and romance. He liked to listen to the garrison band that played in the plaza three nights a week; he thought the dirty, narrow, twisted streets picturesque, and the flash of dark eyes beneath a *mantilla* still thrilled him in spite of Richmond's acid comments upon the probability of negro blood and the certainty of obesity after the age of twenty-five or thereabouts.

They found the owner, clerk, manager and head-waiter of the Hotel Europa standing in front of his just-reopened place of business, gazing tearfully at the splintered remains of a number of his café tables that had been used in the barricade.

"*Que pasa*, Don Faustino?" asked Richmond as the two sat down at one of the uninjured tables. "Why so peeved? Didn't the little war suit you?"

"Why should I not be peeved, as you say it," spluttered the plump Faustino in fair English. "Look at what they do to my hotel! Eight tables of such a splinteredness they are useless. Many bottles and glasses broken by bullets. My side door smashed where the *soldados* entered. *Por Dios*, why should I not be *triste?*"

"Slow and easy," drawled Richmond. "Avoid excitement, mental or physical. That's rule one. Forget your wrongs, Don

Faustino, and bring us a couple of *agua de coco* if the army didn't use all your coconuts for hand-grenades."

Richmond turned his back on the plaza and watched Faustino slash the ends off a couple of green coconuts with deft strokes of a heavy knife produced from some mysterious hiding-place in his garments, and pour the colorless liquid from the coconuts into two tall glasses. The younger man continued to watch the aftermath of battle taking place in the plaza. Small bodies of government troops were passing through on their way back to the barracks, smoking and laughing with little semblance of discipline. A few bound and discouraged looking Beolistas were in the midst of each group.

"The moral of that," said Richmond when Stevens called his attention to the prisoners, "is 'Revolute in haste, repent at leisure.' If Don Miguel had waited a month or so he might have had a show. The army was beginning to get dissatisfied, not having been paid in eight months, and it might have joined him instead of smashing him."

"What will they do with the prisoners?"

"Oh, they'll shoot a few—the leaders and any one that Coronel Perez happens to have a grudge against. They will let the rest go in a few days, after the excitement has died down and they've all sworn allegiance again."

A squad of soldiers was beginning to remove the bodies from the plaza, laying them on the floor of the Europa. Stevens had never seen a dead man before—that is, one who had died by violence—and the sight fascinated him. The Irishman who had worked the machine-gun was among them, his face covered with clotted blood from a gash on the side of his head. Richmond surveyed the bodies commiseratingly.

"Poor ——," he said. "It seems like a —— of a waste. Just because Don Miguel Beola got sore at the way Pelayo fixed the election and talked about justice and patriotism, these *pobrecitos* lie dead in the gutter. Day after tomorrow they and the whole thing will be forgotten, and the only difference will be a new door on the opera house and some new tables in the café here."

"Who is the Irishman? At least, he looks like one," interrupted Stevens.

"No idea," replied Richmond with a cursory glance. "Probably some romantic fool like yourself. You would have been in this two-spot revolution if I hadn't talked to you like a Dutch uncle, young 'un. Avoid excitement, mental or physical—that's the first rule in the tropics. It applies to everything, even when it may not seem to. Take the matter of taking a chance and drinking some unboiled water. It's the excitement of wondering if you'll get fever that you've got to avoid there. Now, take this case——"

"Say, look over there!" Stevens interrupted the other man's drawling harangue upon his favorite subject to point at another detachment of soldiers passing through the plaza. "What do you make of that?"

This squad was under the command of a much be-medaled officer who preserved better discipline than the others had shown. In the center of the detachment walked a lone prisoner, a girl. She wore the nondescript skirt and blouse of a low class woman of the poorer part of the city, but it needed no second glance to show that she did not belong in them.

Every inch of her five and a half feet spoke of family, good breeding and education. She held herself haughtily erect, staring coldly past her guards. Her clothes were somewhat disordered, as if she had resisted her captors, and her long hair—hair of a particularly beautiful and lustrous black—fell down behind. Her hands were tied hard together behind her back with a piece of rope, the end of which was held by one of her guards.

The squad halted for a moment, and the girl drooped wearily and closed her eyes. Richmond whistled softly.

"Well I'll be ——," he said. "It's Bianca!"

"Bianca?"

"The one and only daughter of old Miguel Beola himself, the *hombre* who started this four flush of a revolution. If you want my guess, I think she is that young mounted officer you admired so much in this afternoon's fracas."

"You mean that that girl commanded the rear guard?"

"Yep. She has done lots of worse things than that. You don't know her little ways. Take it from me, *chico*, Bianca is a very unusual girl."

Richmond studied the bottom of his glass as though wondering whether to say more.

"They say she is the real head and brains of the revolution. She certainly has the empire complex, if you get me. Has a great desire for power, and wants to rule and all that sort of thing."

"Good ——, she's beautiful!" exclaimed the impressionable Stevens staring hard at the girl who drooped so wearily in her bonds. "Say, old-timer, find out for me what they are going to do with her."

"Slow and easy," drawled Richmond without moving. "Why all the rush and curiosity? You'll find out eventually."

"Well, if you don't go and ask that general or whatever he is commanding her guards, I will. I feel sorry for the girl."

"Look out for that feeling. It's treacherous. And stay right where you are, *chico*, I'll go."

Richmond drew his lanky frame protestingly upright and ambled across the plaza.

BIANCA raised her head and glanced around, moving her bound hands in an attempt to ease the tightness of the encircling cords. Her eyes met those of Stevens, and he read the entreaty in her glance. The blood rushed to his face, and he found himself blushing unreasonably. He tried to make reassuring signs, but stopped and became suddenly interested in his cigar when a couple of the soldiers noticed and began to stare at him.

The detachment moved on, Bianca looking back at Stevens as she was lead away. Richmond returned and told the other what he had been able to learn. Don Miguel had escaped into the mountains with a few companions. Bianca had been caught because she delayed to change into woman's clothing. She was to be tried for treason along with the rest of the prisoners.

"And what then?" asked Stevens.

"Oh, she'll probably be found guilty and sentenced to be shot sometime tomorrow."

"Good ——, man, we can't let them do that! We have got to help her."

"Slow and easy. I said she would be sentenced, but I didn't say she would actually be shot. Her old man got away, and besides, they have rich friends. *El Presidente* will probably issue a stay of execution or something, and give them a chance to ransom her."

Further conversation was interrupted by another voice speaking in English, a sort of hoarse whisper.

"Do you boys feel inclined to win the undying gratitude of Timothy Burke?"

The two stared at each other and then looked around without being able to locate the speaker. Then Stevens happened to glance at the body of the red-headed machine-gunner and saw that one eye had opened.

"Yes, it's me," whispered Burke, moving his lips with difficulty because of the clotted blood. "Little Tim isn't dead yet, not quite. How about helping me get somewhere before the *soldados* come back for my carcase? Sure, it's a man of your own race I am, and a good poker player, too. I can even do some card tricks. You'll not be leaving me here to be picked up and shot by a bunch of dirty spigs."

Burke had not moved a muscle except for his lips, and none of the few other people in the Europa or strolling through the plaza had noticed the whispered dialogue. Richmond gripped Stevens' shoulder with his bony hand.

"You sit still. I'll manage this."

His tone was crisp and incisive, for once Stevens saw him lay aside his habitual poise of lazy, indolent cynicism.

Richmond strode quickly over to a row of battered coaches that stood in line in front of the Casino Español, picked one that had its top up, and shook the driver into wakefulness. The coach drove up at the side of the Europa, stopping at Richmond's direction directly in line with the spot where Burke was again giving his best imitation of a very dead corpse. Richmond again seized Stevens by the shoulder.

"Go out there in the middle of the street," he said in a fierce whisper, "and attract their attention. "Act drunk, or crazy, or preach a sermon, or kill yourself, or something. But attract their attention! *Vayase!*"

Stevens walked out in front of the Europa and began to shout and stagger around drunkenly. Don Faustino and the few patrons in the café glanced up in surprize a moment, muttered "*Borracho Americano,*" and turned away.

Stevens realized he must do something more startling. In his college days he had been considered a fine cheer leader, but there in the gathering dusk, in the plaza of a little Central American city that had never heard of cheer leaders, he surpassed himself.

He gave in rapid succession all the cheers of his college; accompanying each with the regulation motions, and adding a number of original ones thought up on the spur of the moment. Not the least of these latter was to stamp a perfectly good Panama hat into a shapeless mass. Faustino and the rest came to the edge of the side walk to watch in amazement, and even the driver of the coach twisted in his seat and craned his neck to watch.

This gave Burke his chance. He got to his feet, staggered quickly over to the coach with Richmond's assistance, and climbed into the back seat where he immediately lost consciousness again. Richmond climbed in beside him. No one had seen except the watchful Stevens.

The coach was of the type to be found in any small Latin American city which are presumably manufactured second hand at the start. At least, a few men living have ever seen a really new one. It had two seats facing each other, and when Burke collapsed on the seat in the back he was well concealed in the shadows of the hood, particularly since it was beginning to get dark. Richmond shouted to the driver and the coach drove rapidly away.

When the coach had gone from sight, Stevens reentered the Europa, leaving the wreck of his Panama in the street. He passed through the café, conscious of the stern glance of Don Faustino and realizing that his heroic measures had probably lost him the respect of that worthy, and climbed up to his room.

He threw open the tall shutters and went out on the balcony for a final smoke before dinner. The short tropical twilight was fast coming to an end, the street lamps in the plaza were lit, and a few stars had appeared. A gentle breeze blew in from seaward and carried the deep note of some steamer whistling for a pilot at the bar.

The rich-toned bronze bells of the cathedral began to peal softly, chiming with a rapid beat very different from the tolling of northern church bells. A few women in light dresses strolled slowly arm in arm around the center of the plaza and an old crone selling lottery tickets hobbled toward the Europa. An itinerant vender of *yumitas*—little balls of coconut meat with raw sugar poured over them—walked slowly up the Street of the Fourth of June, crying his wares from time to time in a high-pitched, droning sing-song. It was one of those moments when time seems to stop and the pulse slows down and the mind is content to stop functioning and merely drink in the surroundings. The moss-covered bronze bells continued to chime softly.

Stevens was possessed by a great feeling of contentment. He felt that in spite of cynics, the tropics had all that was claimed for them. They had beauty, romance and adventure. The dirt and disease and corruption were there too, but it was possible to overlook them.

He felt a great sympathy for the unfortunate girl he had seen led to captivity or worse, sympathy of that dangerous sort that is likely to grow into a stronger feeling. It should be mentioned that Stevens was really very young. Plans for her escape began to form in his mind, vague nebulous plans that were abandoned while still half-formed. He wondered how old she was, if she spoke English, what she was like. In short, Stevens was rapidly losing that calm aloofness so greatly esteemed by Richmond.

STEVENS ate dinner in the Europa with the collector of customs who happened to be one Larue, a Frenchman. Larue found him poor company, silent and self-engrossed one minute, talking excitedly the next. Stevens finished his meal in a hurry, declined an invitation to play *vingt et un*, and walked down the Avenida Independencia to the consulate.

The consulate, a former private house, was a limestone one-story building similar to any other house on the street. Its particular color scheme was purple and green, with fancy brown tiles set in the front wall for a distance of about four feet up from the pavement. The place looked deserted, but after Stevens had knocked softly a few times the small door that formed part of the big one was opened by Richmond himself. He warned the newcomer to be quiet, saying that the wounded Burke was asleep in one of the back rooms.

"How is he?" asked Stevens.

"Oh, he's right enough. A bullet through the fleshy part of one arm and a mere knock on the head don't mean much to a young *hombre* as husky as he seems to be. I washed his wounds and put him to bed, and he slid right off to sleep."

"Did the cab driver see you bring him in?"

"No. As soon as he stopped in front of

this place I sent him around the corner to buy some *cigarillos* and carried Burke in while he was away. Nearly wrecked me, too; the young Irisher weighs more than I do."

Stevens looked thoughtfully at Richmond, and then grinned.

"How about that avoid excitement stuff you are always pulling? Here you have sheltered a man for whom the whole army is probably searching right now. Is that the 'restful caution' you preached to me?"

Richmond seemed somewhat embarrassed. He refused to meet the other man's eye and began to fill his pipe. After a pause he spoke without looking up.

"*Pues*," he drawled. "We all do —— fool things now and then. I couldn't quite sit there and let the *soldados* come along and find out that the poor —— wasn't dead and then complete the job. What are you grinning at, anyway?"

"Sure!" answered Stevens grinning even more broadly. "Don't apologize. I understand. Now I have got something else for you to do, something you'll enjoy."

"Yeah?"

Stevens was suspicious. They had come into the patio, and he now slouched into a chair and put his feet on the coping of the long-dried-up fountain.

"What is it?"

"You are going to help me rescue the beautiful Señorita Bianca Beola from whatever castle, cave or dungeon she is confined in."

"Tell that to the *rurales*," growled the other. "I've been a fool once today and that's enough. I knew those dark eyes of Bianca's would have that effect on you. They always do. I suppose you think you're in love with her already. They ought to shut that girl up somewhere. She's dangerous."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean you've not the first young *hombre* to start feeling sympathetic and protective toward her. She'd twist you around her finger, young 'un. What that girl wants, she gets. And she doesn't give a hoot in ——how she gets it, either. Now she wants to be the big push in this country, so she started a war to put her old man in power and rule through him. —— help Pelayo, with her against him! Don't worry about her, *chico*. Have a drink and forget it."

"You're a sour, pessimistic, cross-grained misanthrope. I don't believe it."

"You'll learn, *chico*, you'll learn."

Considering this warning as more of Richmond's habitual pose, Stevens laughed, forgot it, and renewed his request. After half an hour of eloquent persuasion he finally got Richmond to admit grudgingly that he might help if the other could think up a plan that looked practical. Stevens was satisfied that this meant he could count on Richmond to see it through, and they immediately went into a conference on ways and means.

Naturally the first thing was to find out where Bianca was imprisoned and what was likely to happen to her. Richmond started off to the military headquarters in the fort to interview Coronel Perez. As American consul Richmond might conceivably ask questions without arousing undue suspicion.

Stevens was smoking and trying to make something out of a Spanish newspaper when he heard a noise behind him. He spun around to find Burke in the doorway. The Irishman was very weak, and hung on the door frame for support, but he grinned cheerfully.

"You go back to bed," commanded Stevens.

"Not till I give ye the thanks of the world's most curious man. I mention the curiosity so that you'll be telling me who it is that has sheltered me and what it is you would be after doing with me."

"What do you think we intend doing with you?" asked Stevens with a smile.

The other feigned deep thought.

"Well," he said, "if its cannibalism you'll find I'm too tough to be of use, and if its ransom you'll find I'm too poor to be of use, and if its that you want murder done you'll find I'm too chicken-hearted."

Stevens reassured him on all three points and again tried to persuade him to return to bed.

"I hope you don't mind my asking," said Burke as he turned away. "But I wanted to be sure. I once had a man help me in New York when some police were after me, and when he had gotten me safely away he stuck a gun in my ear, handed me a bomb, and started to march me off to blow up the government or something. I threw him in the river, but it made me a cautious man."

With his fears at rest Burke went back to bed, where he fell asleep again in spite of a slight fever from his wound. Nearly two hours had passed and Stevens was beginning to worry when he heard Richmond unlock the front door. On entering, the consul threw his hat in the corner, sat down, elevated his feet to the table and reached for the inevitable pipe.

"Well, what took you so long?" demanded the younger man.

"Went first to the fort, learned that *el coronel* was at the *carcel*—the jail, y'know—and chased over there. He kept me waiting twenty minutes, —— his hide!"

"Well?"

"Well, I saw him and inquired about Bianca. He said she had been tried and sentenced to be shot at noon tomorrow. I asked him why the departure from the conventional sunrise, but he only looked blank. Guess he never goes to the movies."

"And then what?"

"Then I protested in the name of humanity and chivalry and so on and asked for a stay of execution because Bianca has American blood in her. He granted it all right, but he made it out such a favor I'm sure he was going to do it anyway. He wouldn't shoot a girl with such rich friends. Perez is no fool."

"Did you find out where they are keeping her?"

"Yes. He even let me see her for a couple of minutes. I found her pretty well tired out but otherwise in good shape. She is in the sixth cell on the upper floor. I can spot it from the outside."

There was a pause, and then Richmond spoke more slowly:

"I think *el coronel* suspects something. He's a wise old bird, and its seldom anybody gives him any flannel *pesetas*. When we went to her cell she wasn't fettered, but as we left he remarked that he was going to put her in chains tomorrow. Don't believe he had thought of it before. From the way he smiled I think it was just his way of saying he didn't trust me. We have got to look out for him."

BURKE'S temperature was down and he was in fair condition the next morning, but it was decided he had better stay quiet inside the consulate for at least another day before any attempt was made to smuggle him out of Santa Clara.

They found him light hearted and talkative, willing and able to discourse for hours on almost any subject except himself. He would talk of his adventures but not of his home or origin. He also did innumerable card tricks and other sleight-of-hand stunts, and was even given to reciting poetry at times.

Once he started to sing, but after one stanza Richmond threw a pair of boots at him and said that he was getting old and that his nerves were not very strong. Burke took this in good part, evidently he was used to having his singing received in that manner. The other two talked him over and decided they could count on his help in the affair of Bianca, although they had not as yet spoken to him about it.

About the middle of the morning Stevens and Richmond started out to look over the *carcel*, the restless Burke having sworn picturesque oaths that he would keep his red head indoors. They strolled along the Avenida Independencia, Richmond seeming rather preoccupied. Once he took advantage of the act of lighting his pipe to glance over his shoulder, and another time he took a bunch of keys from his pocket and deliberately dropped them, glancing back as he stooped to pick them up.

When they reached the plaza he suggested a drink at the bar of the Europa. As they leaned on the tall bar of light, native mahogany, he suddenly pointed to the mirror in front of them.

"Don't turn around," he said quietly. "Just look in the mirror. See that particularly soiled peon in a blue shirt leaning against the third lamp post?"

"Yes."

"He has been following us ever since we left the consulate. Guess Perez put him on our trail. I was right about *el coronel* suspecting something. The sooner we think up a plan and carry it out the better. We will have to lose that bare-footed sleuth before we do anything else, though."

They drained their glasses of Bacardi and turned away, passing close by their shadow without a glance. Instead of heading toward the *carcel* which was in the upper part of the city they walked down Calle Simon Bolivar toward the water front. Arriving at the docks they began to walk very quickly, circling around or dodging through warehouses, and twice doubling back on their tracks. At the end of fifteen minutes of this hide and seek their peon was not to be seen, and they immediately headed up toward the part of the city beyond the plaza, the quarter where the houses straggle up the hill sides and the streets run steep and narrow.

In the early days of Santa Clara the convent of Santa Eulalia had been a prosperous, thriving nunnery set on the hill side above the town. When the buccaneers sacked the town the more fortunate nuns fled back into the jungles, where most of them died of the fever. Some of them stayed, but they did not live. The sea wolves used the roomy, walled building as their headquarters. The walls of the convent rocked to the lilt of coarse ballads where before there had been only softly chanted psalms, and the chapel saw scenes of horror that are best forgotten.

The buccaneers stripped the place of everything of value and left the building little more than an empty shell. After this desecration, the pious citizens considered the convent unfit for further religious purposes, and it became a barracks. For the last sixty or seventy-five years it had been the prison, *el carcel*, its original purpose almost forgotten.

The slow tread of the jailers echoed in the long corridors, and many civil and political offenders disappeared behind the high, encircling wall and never reappeared. The blank north wall of the patio was pitted by the impact of many volleyed bullets, and the dark cells of the underground tier had held the answer to more than one puzzling mystery of Central American politics.

With the passing of the years the city had extended up the hillside until it now reached well beyond *el carcel*. The houses encroached close upon the outer walls. Along the east ran Calle Altagracia, a bare fifteen feet wide from the wall of the prison to the fronts of the houses on the opposite side of the street. These houses were mostly one story in height, narrow but long, the front forbidding with their big wooden doors and two or three barred and shuttered windows, the life of the inhabitants centering around the long patios inside. Now and then there was a house of a newer type of construction—two storied, with a sort of columned portico in front.

As the two Americans strolled slowly along Calle Altagracia they could just see the tops of the windows of the second tier of cells, everything below that being hidden by the outer surrounding wall. The street seemed deserted except for a few children playing in the dust and a Chinese vender of vegetables going from house to house with his two baskets slung on a pole; but they were careful to avoid seeming too interested in the prison. Richmond spoke softly:

"Her window is the sixth on this side, that one right there. There's about a ten foot space between this wall and the building itself, the sentries patrol that space. Incidentally, this wall has a lovely crop of broken glass set in mortar at the top."

The two men had reached the end of the prison wall, at which point the narrow street made a sharp turn.

"Looks like a pretty tough nut to crack, *chico*," drawled Richmond. "Set that active brain of yours to work. And forget all about the main front gate, it's too well guarded."

"Yes, it looks bad," agreed Stevens. "But there must be some way out—I mean in."

He glanced around.

"Nobody seems to have noticed us, let's walk by again on our way back."

THEY walked slowly past the long gray wall of the *carcel* once more and then started back to the consulate. They went in silence, both busy on the problem, and about half way back Stevens stopped suddenly.

"I have it," he said excitedly. "Listen! The house directly across the street from her cell is the two-storied type, and the balcony of the second floor is right on a level with the top of the wall. The street is so narrow that we should be able to bridge it easily with a couple of long planks or a ladder. That house was shut up and looked as if the people were away, we ought to be able to burglarize our way in."

"Carrying a couple of ladders in your hip pocket?"

"Don't be a wet blanket, we can get around that some way."

Richmond offered some more objections, but finally agreed that the plan might work if they could devise some way of getting a ladder or some long planks to the house. It would cause suspicion if they tried to do it themselves, and they didn't want to take anyone else except Burke into their confidence.

On returning to the consulate they told Burke of their plans and he instantly agreed to help. He seemed to find some secret humor in the situation, and was observed chuckling to himself at intervals. He suggested that they take the chance of finding something to use as a bridge after getting in the house, but they decided this was too uncertain. At last Richmond wrote a note to a local hardware merchant, using a page torn from a note book, as might be done by a man in a hurry. He disguised his writing, making it look as much like the ornate Latin style as possible, and signed himself "Miguel Espinosa."

He wrote that he, Don Miguel Espinosa, had just rented a house in Calle Altagracia and desired a ladder. He inclosed the money, saying that he had called when the store was closed, and that the ladder was to be left on the front porch if no one was home. They did not know whose house it was, but the risk of its belonging to a regular customer of the merchant in question seemed slight. Stevens carried the letter around about noon, at which time the stores were closed for the mid-day interval, and pushed it under the door of the hardware store. The plan had its disadvantages, but they were unable to think of a better one, and the fact that Perez was having them shadowed indicated the need for quick action.

Richmond and Burke ate dinner in the consulate, but they thought it best for Stevens to dine at the Europa as usual. Immediately afterwards he went over to the consulate. He had eaten little, the thrill of approaching danger having robbed him of his appetite. The Irish in Burke had made him react in the same way, but Richmond seemed to think no more of jail breaking than of a trip to the *cine*.

They sat around waiting for it to get late. For a while they tried to play poker, but were unable to keep their minds on it, and quit when Stevens threw down four kings under the mistaken apprehension that three deuces would beat them. After that they simply sat around and talked. Burke told an endless string of adventures, claiming to have been everything from a Chinese river pirate to a New York cop. As each yarn was more striking, and as he could not possibly have crowded so much into some twenty-six or twenty-seven years, the others were unimpressed.

About ten o'clock Richmond knocked out his pipe, remarking that it was time to get ready. All three put on ragged clothing and large battered *sombreros*, secured that afternoon. They could not have passed in the daytime, but it was a good enough disguise at night. Street lighting in Santa Clara is mainly conspicuous by its absence, and the moon was past the full.

Half an hour later they slipped quietly out the door. They were prepared to lose any of Perez' men that followed, but they soon became convinced that they were not shadowed. Whether this was because of the failure of the attempt to shadow them earlier in the day, or because of the lateness of the hour, it was impossible to say. All three had flashlights, and Stevens carried a couple of coarse files and a jimmy wrapped up in an old gunny sack. Burke had a revolver and a coil of light rope, while the lean Richmond was unrecognizably fat with the bulk of a half-dozen empty sacks wrapped around his body beneath his outer clothes.

They circled the plaza, where there was the most chance of meeting some one, and followed devious back ways toward the *carcel*. No one was passed on the way except a solitary *policia*, who gave them no more than an idle glance as they went by. At last they stood at the foot of Calle Altagracia, the Street of High Grace. It stretched before them like a shallow cañon, with the blackness of Erebus in its depths and the light of a waning moon still shining on the upper parts of the houses on the side opposite *el carcel*.

Neither light nor movement was there, only the breeze rustling the palm fronds and the occasional rattle of a shutter. The thick dust was a soft, unseen carpet beneath their feet. It was as unreal as a dream, and the three stopped in their tracks. Richmond was the first to throw off the spell, and then he started on, the others followed.

Ahead of them loomed the dark bulk of the *carcel*. When the street intersection at the near end of the wall was reached, Burke stopped and leaned against the wall in the shadow. The other two continued in silence, and when they came to the house opposite Bianca's cell they saw that a long ladder lay against the front wall.

Stevens stopped at the house while Richmond continued to the turn of the street at the far end of the prison wall, where he took a quick look around and then pressed the button of his flashlight for an instant.

Seeing this "all's well" signal Stevens

took the jimmy and inserted the edge in the crack of the door, prying at it and trying to get the most force with the least noise. In a little over a minute something gave way and the door swung open a couple of inches. He pushed it wide, wondering if the prison guards could possibly help hearing the creak of the hinges, and waited.

Nothing moved, either inside the house or elsewhere, so he stepped out into the street and gave a single flash of his pocket lamp in each direction. Burke and Richmond came up on the run, their sandaled feet making no sound in the thick dust.

They lifted the ladder and carried it inside, closing the door after them. The screws of the lock had been ripped loose when Stevens forced the door, but there was an extra bolt, and this they slid into place.

THE circling beam of Richmond's flashlight removed any lingering doubt about the house being unoccupied as the furniture was covered with white cloths and the dust lay thick on everything. Immediately before them was the vestibule, cut off from the rest of the house by a white painted iron grille work, the gate in which stood open.

Beyond was the parlor, and then the patio. The house was rather large, and the pieces of furniture, though of tropical fewness, were expensive. While Burke held a flashlight, the other two carried the ladder out into the patio and leaned it up against the second floor windows, this being an easier method then trying to navigate the stairs with it. They then climbed the stairs and went into the front room that gave onto the upper balcony, this balcony being supported by the columns of the portico. Richmond peered between the slats of the shutters.

"The moon still hits the upper part of the house," he said. "We had better wait ten minutes or so."

They squatted on the smooth tiles of the floor, occasionally talking in low tones, while Burke smoked nervously. As he ground out a cigaret stub with the handle of the jimmy he muttered—

"—— it, I don't like the feel of this place!"

"Why not?"

"There is somebody else in the house."

"Have you heard anything?"

"Not a sound. But I can feel them. There's somebody here."

"Bunk! Irish imagination."

"Irish ——! I can tell."

"Bunk."

"Suit yourself. I'm going to look around."

Burke catfooted down the stairs, and they heard faint sounds from below. A few minutes later he returned.

"Find anything?" asked Richmond.

"Not a thing. I guess there's no one there, but this place sure feels funny."

They sat in silence for the rest of the time. It was dead quiet except for the sighing of the night wind, and they could even hear the sentry go by in the prison yard across the way. Richmond timed him, noting that it was about ten minutes before he went by again. When the slow, lagging tread of the guard had died out for the second time, they softly folded back the shutters of the front windows.

They got the ladder from the patio, carried it through the house to the front, and began to push it over the porch rail, end first. This was accomplished without noise, but not without difficulty. Near the end all three had to keep their entire weight on the short end to counteract the leverage of the twelve feet or so that extended out into the air. Panting and straining, they shoved it forward inch by inch, and at last the far end rested on top of the prison wall, fifteen feet away across the street. The wall was less than a foot higher than the balcony rail, and the ladder was nearly horizontal.

They had agreed that Stevens was the one to cross the ladder. He had insisted on it from the first, as the whole expedition had been his idea, and he seemed the logical one aside from that.

Burke's wounded arm prevented him from doing anything quite so active, and Richmond was well past his first youth. Stevens thrust his flashlight into one pocket and the two files into another, took the pile of empty gunny sacks which had been made up into a bundle, and climbed onto the ladder. Pushing the gunnies in front he crawled across, the ladder creaking slightly but showing itself plenty strong enough for the task.

The ten-foot space between the wall and *el carcel* itself was lighted by a couple of smoky lanterns hung from iron spikes, these lanterns having little effect on the deep gloom left by the setting of the moon.

There was no one in sight, nor were there any lights in the prison windows.

Stevens squatted on the ladder and piled the gunny sacks on the wall beside him, thus forming a thick protecting pad over the jagged, broken glass that was set in the mortar. Climbing over on to the pad, he began to pull on the ladder. The other two had tied one end of their rope to their end of the ladder and they paid out slowly as he pulled, preventing any sudden jerk as the end slipped off the balcony rail. It was ticklish work, but Stevens was able to slide the ladder across the wall till its far end rested on the sill of the barred window of the girl's cell. He crawled across to the sill and listened.

Everything seemed quiet inside the prison except for a man muttering in his sleep in one of the nearby cells. There appeared to be no guards in the corridor. Stevens called softly.

"Miss Beola! *Senorita!*"

There was no answer, and he called again a little louder.

"*Senorita!* Bianca!"

He heard the creaking of a bed spring, and then a soft voice replied:

"*Que pasa? Quien es?*"

He thrilled at the sound of her voice, rich, clear and musical.

"We are friends come to help you escape. Can you come to the window?"

"No, I am chained to the wall here. Now I know you. You are that nice young American with the sympathetic eyes I saw in the plaza."

This showed a remarkable power of perception of Bianca's part, inasmuch as it was certainly too dark for her to be able to see his features. As Richmond had remarked, she was a remarkable girl in more ways than one.

"I have a file here that you can use on your chains. Will there be danger of anybody noticing if I turn my flashlight on you a minute, so I can see where to throw the file?"

"No, there are no guards in the hallways!"

Stevens wrapped the extra file in a piece torn from his shirt and then turned on his flashlight. Bianca was standing near the far wall, rubbing the sleep from her eyes and smiling adorably. What little of Stevens affection she did not already have went out to her when he saw that smile. He noted the gleam of metal at her wrists, and then the light flashed from the slender steel chain that joined them. He threw the file, the cloth-wrapped metal falling soundlessly at her feet, and immediately snapped off the light. A moment later the soft rasp of her file told him that she was at work on her fetters.

THE window bars were closely placed, and he saw that he would have to remove three to get her out. The bars were as old as *el carcel* itself, and the coarse file bit deep at every stroke. He passed his left arm around one of the bars to steady himself and filed away with both hands.

The minutes went by, and his eyes grew more used to the blackness. Little by little his file cut through the bar, and the rasp of Bianca's file kept pace with his.

Stevens had just cut through the base of one bar when he heard a jingle inside the cell and a low exclamation from Bianca. The next moment she was at the window.

"Are you free?" he whispered.

"Not entirely," she replied. "Feel!" and she put her hands in his.

Stevens found that she was still chained wrist to wrist, an eighteen-inch piece of chain connecting the steel cuffs.

"I filed the chain holding me to the wall," she continued. "Now I will help you with the bars. We can remove these others later."

As she put her file to the bar Stevens saw the sentry appear around the distant corner of the building. They stopped filing, and Stevens crouched motionless on the sill. Bianca slid one of her hands into his, and he felt her trembling with excitement. The sentry sauntered carelessly along with his rifle under his arm. He was evidently in the habit of enjoying a smoke on this portion of his beat, and the close attention he gave to his cigaret kept him from noticing the ladder stretched across above him or the still figure on the window sill.

When the sentry had passed the two files again began their work. Bianca continued the whispered conversation.

"What do we do when the bars are out?"

"Use this ladder to get across the street into that house. Two friends are waiting there. We will hide you in—in the house of one of us until we get a chance to smuggle you out on some friendly steamer."

"That will be fine."

She was silent for a few minutes.

"You are very brave to do this."

Stevens denied the accusation in a violent and somewhat incoherent whisper.

"Oh yes, you are!" she continued. "I will not forget. And my friends will not forget, for I still have friends. Friends who had not been hunted down by that evil-hearted vulture!"

She spat on the floor. Stevens was startled. This did not quite fit in with the gentle-natured girl he had been imagining.

"Who?"

"*El Presidente*, Jose Maria Pelayo!" She pronounced the name with deep bitterness. The man who is at this time president of my unfortunate country. You are a new-comer. You do not realize what a fiend he is. I hate him, I hate him more than I thought it possible to hate anybody! I would not trust myself to see him, for I should probably try to kill him, woman though I am!"

To Stevens there again came the vague realization that Bianca was not quite the gentle, helpless girl he had expected to find her. Seeing her in battle should have meant more to him than it had.

The sentry came around once more before they were through, and again passed without noticing anything. They were nearing the end of their task when they heard the roar of an automobile, driven fast and with open cut-out. It shot down Calle Altagracia, turned the corner with a squeal of brakes, and apparently came to a stop in front of the prison gates. Whether or not this was because the occupants of the car had noticed the end of the ladder protruding over the prison wall they did not know. They heard the hoarse stridency of the motor horn, followed by the cry of a sentry calling out the guard.

"Quick, quick!" whispered Bianca. "Someone has come, something is happening! Hurry!"

All three bars were cut through at the bottom, and one was nearly severed at the top. Stevens laid down his file and grasped that bar just above the lower cut, pulling with the combined strength of arms, back, and legs. The weakened bar gave easily, and Bianca took it and laid it on the cell floor. The second bar was another matter, and Bianca lent her strength to his. The soft old metal gave way slowly under the strain, and the bar bent upward and outward. The corridor lights were suddenly switched on, the glow from the door lighting up the cell.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Bianca whispered again. Stevens hands were bleeding and his vision was blurred, the terrific strain set the blood pounding at his temples. The last bar was the hardest, it seemed made of tougher metal than its fellows. Somehow they bent it enough for Bianca to slip out onto the ladder.

They crawled along to the wall and crouched on the pile of gunny sacks. Richmond and Burke, watching from across the way, had seen the corridor lights go on and sensed the danger. As Stevens and the girl left the ladder for the gunnies the other two hauled in on the rope till the end of the ladder again rested on the balcony rail. The rungs rattled noisily as they were dragged over the jagged glass on top of the wall, but speed was now more important than silence.

Bianca crawled across to the house, slightly hampered by her chains. Stevens gathered up the sacks, and heard a shout behind him as some one opened the door of the rifled cell. He ran across the ladder on the rungs without holding on and jumped down beside Richmond, who immediately shoved the ladder off the rail so that it fell clattering to the street below. The two of them ran inside, slamming the shutters as they did so, and found Bianca and Burke in each others arms.

"They told me you were dead, *amor mio!*" she was saying.

"Not a bit of it, acushla!" Burke's brogue was strong under the stress of emotion. "Their whole —— army couldn't kill me with you in trouble!"

Stevens stopped short, and the joy and excitement of adventure faded, leaving him conscious of his torn and bleeding hands and feeling tired and, somehow, old. He now understood Burke's secret mirth when asked to do them a favor by helping rescue Bianca.

"For ——'s sake let that stuff wait!" snapped Richmond. "It's pretty dark, but they probably saw us come in here. Our only chance is to get out of the house before they can send a squad out the gate and around into this street. Come on!"

Richmond leading, they went down the

stairs at full speed and came to the vestibule grille-work. The gate in the grating was closed and locked.

"This was wide open when we went upstairs." Richmond swore under his breath. "And it's not a snap lock. Somebody has been here."

"I told you there was some one in the house," put in Burke.

"How about the back door, if there is one?"

Stevens turned toward the back of the house. They crossed the patio, jerked open a door and stepped through. There came the click of a switch, and they found themselves standing in a brightly lighted room. A thick-set man in uniform rose to his feet, smiling with apparent cordiality as he covered them with an automatic.

"Come in, *senorita*, and you, *caballeros*," he said. "My house is honored by your visit."

There was mockery in the tone and words. Bianca was staring at him wide-eyed.

"Coronel Perez!" she gasped. "Is this your house?"

"It is that of my wife's brother—at your service," continued the swarthy commandant of the garrison. "I have been expecting you for some time. I pass by every day to be sure the house is undisturbed, and the presence of an unexpected ladder was—how do you say—food for thought. I flatter myself I guessed your plan very quickly.

Stevens suddenly laughed, Burke swore, and Bianca glared in silence. At this point Stevens realized that Richmond was not with them, that he had not entered the room at all; and this gave him new hope. Perez was enjoying himself immensely. He continued in the same mocking tone:

"You will be wondering why I allowed you to escape from *el carcel* at all. I will be frank with you, so that there will be no misunderstanding. If there is to be a ransom, I prefer that it come to me." He noticed the blood dripping from Stevens hands. "Are you hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of. I tore my hands a little pulling at the bars when we heard that auto arrive and things began to happen in the prison."

"Auto? What auto?"

Amazement showed plainly on the face of *el coronel*, amazement and fear, but before Stevens could answer him there came the crash of many rifle butts on the front door of the house. Perez' jaw dropped, and he looked around wildly. The door, already weakened by Stevens earlier efforts with the jimmy, gave way almost at once, and the invaders attacked the inner grille-work. Perez hurled aside the table and leaped for the door, but Burke tripped him neatly, saying—

"We're in the same boat now, my lad."

Just as Perez got to his feet again a half dozen soldiers led by a tall, black-bearded man in civilian clothes burst into the room. There was a moment of silence, and then Perez pulled himself together and saluted.

"I—I did not know you were coming, señor" he said.

"So I have gathered," replied the other grimly. "I did not intend you to. Have the kindness to hand me your pistol."

Perez was evidently considering a refusal, but the rifles of the soldiers menaced him, and he obeyed sulkily.

"I learned of the plot to rescue the girl and wished to do my duty by preventing it myself."

"As to that we shall see. You are under arrest."

Perez shrugged his shoulders.

"As *el presidente* wishes."

At the entrance of this man Bianca had started so violently that her chains rattled, and stared at him with parted lips. If she had been surprised at seeing Perez, she was now infinitely more so.

"Presidente Pelayo!" she said at last.

He bowed gravely.

"I have the honor—or should one say misfortune? I take it that you are that rebel leader of whom I have heard so much and whom I drove down from the capitol to see."

Bianca did not reply, but continued to study him thoughtfully.

IT WAS four days later, and Stevens and Burke had shared a cell in the *carcel* during that period without seeing anyone except the guard who brought them the rice and fried plantains they received once a day. Opinion about Richmond was divided.

"I'm telling you he got away," Burke was saying. "He wasn't with us when Bianca and you and I went bursting on Perez like a pack of baboons."

"But if he got away, why hasn't he tried to see us or help us in some way? And how could he have gotten away anyway?"

"As to the latter, my lad, you'll remember that he was still trying to open the grating when the rest of us walked into Perez' little trap. It would have been easy for him to slip upstairs when the *soldados* arrived."

"I suppose so."

"Sure. And as for not trying to help us, how do you know he hasn't? Is it that you expect him to sing ballads outside our window? Maybe they wouldn't let him see us."

Conversation lapsed for a while, and then Stevens said thoughtfully—

"I wonder what they have done with Bianca."

"Take no originality to yourself for that, I have been doing some wondering myself."

"We heard the sound of a firing squad day before yesterday."

"That'd be Perez, not Bianca."

"How do you know?"

"Because there was death in the eyes of *el presidente* when he looked at Perez, and there was something very different when he looked at Bianca, the skunk!"

"I am worried about her, though. She seemed terribly bitter against Pelayo. As much as said she would try to kill him if she got half a chance. It's a bad thing when a woman hates like that, Burke. She may try to kill him or something, and you can't tell what they may do to her."

Burke's position was simple. He loved Bianca, he had joined the revolution because of her, he believed that she loved him, and as soon as he got out he was going to make another attempt to rescue and marry her. This he maintained with arguments, profanity and fists.

Stevens' position was a trifle more complex but equally deep-seated. In his heart he felt that he had a prior claim, as having almost certainly loved Bianca generations ago when the world was young. Of this, however, he did not speak to Burke. He contented himself with maintaining that he had loved Bianca since he first saw her in the plaza, and that their conversation between the bars indicated that she felt the same way toward him.

Sometime the next morning their cell door opened and Richmond walked in. Making sure that the guard who admitted him had retired out of hearing, the two besieged him with eager questions. He answered some of them briefly, ignoring others with a curious reserve.

As they had guessed, he had been a little behind and had not walked into Perez' trap. When the soldiers started battering down the door he had retired to the second floor, staying there till things quieted down. He had come to the *carcel* inquiring about Stevens, saying that Don Faustino of the Europa had reported his disappearance, but they had denied all knowledge of the young *Americano*. He could not do more without incriminating himself, and had had to be content with inquiring twice a day for trace of the missing man. This time they had admitted him.

"But how about Bianca?" inquired the other two eagerly.

"Bianca is all right," said Richmond slowly, staring at the floor. "She has been released."

"Hot snakes! Then all I have to do is get out of here, find her and hunt for a priest!"

Burke was joyously effervescent. Stevens regarded him sourly.

"Yes? Try and get away with it. Our truce is off when we get out, remember."

"Well, you both get out in half an hour," interrupted Richmond. "You've both been released on condition you take the first ship out, which happens to be the *Carib Empress* sailing this afternoon."

"But suppose I'm not wanting to leave?" said Burke.

"That wouldn't affect things in the slightest."

"But I can't leave!" protested Stevens. "The fruit company——"

"The company has already ordered you to Jamaica, at Pelayo's request. It's no use, *chicos*, you've both got to go."

In about half an hour the gate of *el carcel* opened to let Burke and Stevens out. Blinking in the bright sun they climbed into a coach where Richmond was already waiting for them. A squad of cavalry closed in around the coach and it started down toward the water front.

The city had the look of a *fiesta*, the houses being hung with flags and flowers and the stores being closed. There were very few people on the streets, but when they came to the plaza they found their way blocked by dense, cheering crowds. A wedding was evidently taking place in the cathedral, and even as the coach halted at the edge of the crowd the doors of the cathedral were thrown wide and the drawn sabres of the military escort lined up outside flashed to the salute. Out from the cathedral stepped *Presidente* Pelayo himself, bowing to the crowds, and leaning on his arm, clad in the white robes of a bride, was Bianca.

The coach rolled on in grim silence till almost to the water front. Finally Burke relaxed, crossed his legs, and observed to the world in general—

"Well, I'm ——!"

Then he grinned, and slapped Stevens on the back.

"Cheer up, my lad," he said. "We're both young, praise be, and the world is wide."

Richmond smiled a twisted smile and gazed into space.

"The path to power!" he muttered. "There's more than one way of getting what you want in this queer world. Bianca decided that the vamp was mightier than the volley."

"But she sure is one little fast worker."

"I always maintained Bianca was an uunsual girl," said Richmond gravely.

HOW THE BROWN BEARS LEFT KUIU

by Victor Shaw

WHY ARE there no Kodiak bear on Kuiu Island, of the Alexander Archipelago in Southeastern Alaska? It is strange there are none, because these enormous brown beasts—no doubt the largest and most savage of all living bears—are numerous on the adjacent islands of Baranoff and Admiralty, which lie close to it on the west and north. Probably no white man, either layman or scientist, can give you a satisfactory answer, but there is one man in Alaska who knows all about it, if he can be induced to talk.

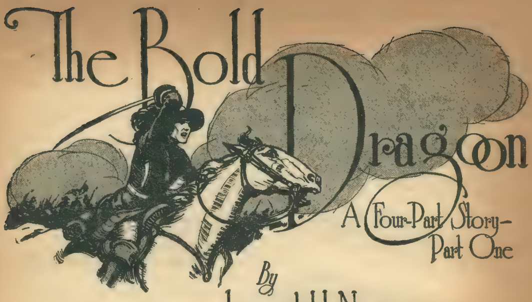
He is an old *tyee*—chief of the Tlinket tribe, who sells furs, seal hide moccasins and curios to summer tourists. His dingy frame shack squats on the beach at the edge of Indian Town, where the big salmon river empties into the head of the cove. On pleasant days he sits in the sun like a wrinkled bronze Buddha, his wares spread about him, at the foot of the totem pole which is carved with grotesque images denoting his family tree. He has no brown bear hide among his stock of pelts. If you ask for one, he will probably say in the Chinook jargon: "*Halo alta—klonas winipie*. Not just now—later, perhaps." If urged, and you know him quite well, he may even tell you how the brown bears were banished from Kuiu Island.

Long, long ago—according to Chief Charley—there were lots of these bears on Kuiu. At that time there were also many Tlinkets living on the island. In fact, although it is a large island, there were so many Tlinkets and so many bears that they crowded and jostled each other beyond endurance There was much quarreling and fighting. Many Tlinkets were killed because the bears were *hyas solleks*—very angry—and they were even bigger and stronger than they are now. It was *hyas nasahchie*—very bad.

The trouble grew worse. Finally every one on the island gathered for a *hyas wawa*—big talk—to see what could be done about it; the Tlinkets on one side and the bears on the other. As a result, it was at last agreed that each side should pick out three of their greatest fighting chiefs and the matter should be fought to a finish between them; the losers to leave the island for good.

That was a wonderful battle. It lasted for days, raging up and down the island and back and forth across it. The sound of battle cries and roaring echoed like thunder. For a long time the issue was in doubt, for the bears were very strong. But the three Tlinket chiefs were also shamans and, when the bears made magic, they wove spells and incantations.

In the end the Tlinket medicine proved to be the most powerful. It at last prevailed over the supernatural powers of the three bear chieftans, and succeeded in killing them. The agreement was then kept, to the letter, and every bear swam across the straits to Admiralty and Baranoff Islands. They never came back.



The Bold Dragoon

A Four-Part Story—Part One

By

Leonard H. Nason

Author of "Eye-Wash," "Rockets at Daybreak," etc.

CHAPTER I

OF A FRENCH OFFICER

IT WAS now coming on to be dark and I perceived to my great consternation that the army continued its march toward Hanau and made no attempt to pursue the routed and dispirited French.

A party of us had been combing the woods on the side toward the mountains, the Spessartwald, as it was called, and I had been left somewhat behind, both because of the trouble I had had in beating off a black musketeer who had tried to pull me from my horse, and the weariness of that same beast. He had had the poorest of forage for the last month and all this cutting and stabbing, this hounding of French Guards through the Main, and scouring about between river bank and woods, had wearied him exceedingly.

So, as I have said, seeing the army was about to abandon the field where they had been so lately victorious, and it being apparent that by nightfall the rearguard would have passed through Dettingen, I turned my horse's head toward the plain and rode back at a slow walk to the road.

It was then that I perceived what I at first thought to be a man of ours, since he came mounted from the woods, but as he came into the plain, and the last light of the sun was upon him for a moment, I discovered him to be a Frenchman, one of the Grenadiers à Cheval by his headgear, and an officer by the richness of his trappings. He rode slowly off away from me, thinking himself safe, for our army was gone, and he had but to follow the road to Aschaffenburg, where he would find the French, for they had a camp there to cut us off when we should have been defeated before Dettingen.

"Now, monseer," thinks I, "you should have stayed holed in the woods a little longer. As it is, you will shortly find yourself lacking a horse, for Hugh Bancroft of Ligoniers hath need of one."

Thereupon I beat upon my horse with my sword and dug him bravely with the spur, and got him into a shambling trot. Now the Frenchman must have perceived me after a time, for the failing light was at my back and I black against it, but he went his way in peace, for he thought to outdistance me. He showed no hurry, nor did he seem to urge his horse, though in the last light I could see him turn in the saddle and the white of his face looking at me.

Now he was upon the plain and I upon the road, and he thought that I could not come up on him, but I had passed by that very road that morning, with cannon-shot from that same Frenchman's guns on the far bank of the Main humming about my ears. When the discharge became heavy and we

"The Bold Dragoon," copyright 1925, by Leonard H. Nason.

began to go down, horse and man, I had looked about me for a place of refuge and had found one, though happily had no use for it. But it was still there, a deep ditch, through which flowed water from the hills down to the Main, and the Frenchman could in no wise cross it, but must follow it along, looking, and hoping, and cursing when he did not find a crossing, until he should come to where I awaited him.

So it fell out. It grew pit dark, for the moon was yet behind the hills, and I could hear him muttering, and the grunting of his horse, and the creak of his saddle housings and the jingling of his saber and aiguillettes some time before he came out upon the road. Here he stopped and let his horse blow, and so I came upon him.

"Hold," said I, "and yield yourself prisoner. Surrender in the King's name."

I suppose I might have saved my breath, for he knew not a word that I said but, knowing that I was English, he must have got the sense of it. Howbeit, he came at me with a rush of hoofs and I, being all unaware and dumfounded to find a monseer with any fight in him—indeed they had given themselves up all through the afternoon as mild as meat cattle—could scarce put my sword in guard before he was upon me, our horses shoulder to shoulder.

His being a heavier horse than mine, and stronger and better fed withall, mine went down, and I with him, rolling over and over in the road, my head covering over my eyes and in fear of either a hoof through my skull, or the Frenchman's sword among my liver. I was up at last, choking for the dust, and all abroad with the darkness and my fall, but with my sword still in hand.

Now had the Frenchman the grace to go off and be content with oversetting me, all would have been well, but he was not suited so to do, and must needs come slashing at me in the dark. Perhaps he had the taste of my blood already in his throat, or was out of mind at the defeat we had given his army, and the spectacle of the French Guards squattering waist deep through the Main, for which to this day they are called the "Ducks of the Main".

He heard my poor horse floundering to his feet and went that way, whence I heard the sound of his sword questing me and doing the poor beast to death. This was more than I could stand, so that I gave a shout and demanded of him that he dismount and do battle like a man. This he would not do, but turning about, came at me again.

"Dismount!" I cried, "down upon the ground if you have a rat's courage!"

Here his blade zipped by my ear, but I gave him such a slash in return as nigh unbalanced me. It struck his horse, and the beast, giving a mighty bound, ran away with his master, bolting across the plain, the officer raging to the patient night. Shortly I heard a cry and great floundering, and so knew my Frenchman must have fallen into the ditch, whither I went as rapidly as I might. His horse had indeed tumbled into the ditch and the noise and clamor of his flailing feet was so great that I could hear no sound of the rider, whether he cried out or not.

"Hallo, there!" I shouted. "Yield, and you shall have my help to land. Surrender, fool, your army hath retreated these three hours."

IT WAS I that was the fool, for he could not know a word I said, and my ass' braying but showed him where I stood, so that he crept up to me and made a mighty cut at me with his sword. He had come too near and it was the hilt that struck me, and not the blade, but I went down, all the stars in the sky spinning before me, and standing on the brink of the ditch as I was, I rolled into it and was near to drown before I had the sense to seize the rushes and pull myself upright.

And this greedy Frenchman, not content that he had smitten me such a knock, and rolled me for dead in the ditch, must hunt up and down, and prod with his sword for my body, that he might plunder it. I hung to the reeds until my head had a little cleared, and I found that I was not overmuch hurt, while the officer slashed and swore. At times he spoke aloud, but did not shout, as I had done, lest he bring some of my friends upon him.

"They are far enough away by now," thinks I, "and have left the field and the wounded and the dead to the kind offices of the crows and the plunderers, and for all the advantage we had made by the victory we might better have been defeated, and I wouldn't have been brought to this pass."

The officer had stood listening for some time and must have heard my breathing, for he cried out as if in vexation and cut down within an inch of my hand. I thereupon let go the reeds, and felt about me for my sword which had fallen from my hand when I rolled into the ditch. It was gone and I could not find it, and the man above me, hearing my movements, began to do his best to kill me, cutting and storming at the edge of the ditch, and slashing down the reeds like a drain cleaner.

The sides of the ditch were steep and I could not come out, and when I moved at all, were I ever so careful, I was bound to stumble a little bit and so make a noise, and have the Frenchman above me hewing down at me with his sword. I began to weaken, for it was cold in the ditch and we had been but poorly fed since we had left Flanders, nor had I had any food all day. I began to perceive that sooner or later I must either yield or be killed by this man, and I cursed myself that I had ever set upon him.

Suddenly I found the ditch blocked. I was unable to tell what it was that barred my way, until happily my hand fell on a saddle and then a horse's mane, and I bethought me at once that when the French had first begun their attack, some of the Austrian horses had bolted, and had fallen into this same ditch, and that it was upon their bodies that I had come.

"Hugh Bancroft," said I, "it was ever your way to fall into a sewer in old clothes and come out clad in a full dress uniform."

Here were saddles, and upon the saddles were holsters, and in the holsters pistols. Immediately then, I opened the holsters of the saddle that was under my hand and drew out the pistols that I knew very well to be loaded, for the Austrians had run at the first onset and had not fired a shot.

"Come on, monseer," I called, "here is an end to this coil."

I climbed upon the horses' bodies to await him. He came rapidly, without further urging, perhaps thinking I had surrendered. I disabused his mind of that, for when he halted very near to me and called out, I fired a pistol so that the flash would show me where he was.

He was not a foot away, right at my hand on the edge of the ditch, his eyes blinded by the flash, and a great sword held aloft ready to cut at me the instant he located me, so I let off the second pistol into his body and had the satisfaction of hearing him go thudding to earth. Before I went out, however, I hunted about for more pistols, but found only one set of holsters above water, that had in them nothing but two bottles of wine.

So I went out and found my Frenchman and having taken his sword out of his hand, I found it to be a very good one. This man had been an officer and his uniform was most gorgeous, with buttons of gold, which I took, and a jeweled gorget, which I also took, together with a watch as big as an apple and sundry rings and what-not, so that the plunderers should not have them.

Then, belting his sword about me, I set out toward the road, and turned my face in the direction taken by the army, a little weary and sadly hampered by my heavy boots. I bethought to search about for my horse, and found him lying dead, so I removed my valise from behind the saddle, in which I had a shirt or two, and some small things of necessity, and then proceeded once more.

I had gone upward of a mile, and was looking off toward the swamp, where a great many wounded, both our own and the French cried for water, and I was thinking what an ill thing it was that the victors of this field should not even care for their wounded, when a voice hailed me in a tongue that I did not understand.

Accordingly I came to a stand, and kicking the heel of my scabbard about, lay hand to the hilt of my new sword and stood ready without answer. He that had hailed was on the side of the road toward the river and must have several companions, for I could hear their horses stamping and snorting.

"These are French," said I, speaking to myself, "come to prey upon our wounded or stragglers, or else they are Austrian hussars. And if either one, then there is a trying of this new sword."

The Austrians, though they had been our allies, were none too well thought of, and there had run a cry about the army toward the latter part of the day, that certain of the Austrians had set upon the Duke of Cumberland and had pistoled him, so that he lay near death.

If they were French, then we must have a fight with them, for no man of the Black Horse, officer or soldier, nor even any horse of our regiment, had yet been taken alive by the French, and I was not minded to be the first one. Howbeit they made no further move nor challenged me again, so I moved on. At once, hearing my feet on the road, they came at me; a gust of hoofs.

I had out my new sword and with it protected my head, but they were all about me and it was only because they were many and the night still dark, that I was not killed at once. I spitted one of them upon my new sword and heard him scream, but at the same instant I felt a blade sliding under my arm and the next moment a blow on my shoulder, that I judged was some one's foot striking me. I swung about and gashed a man's leg and running under a rearing horse, thrust upwards at his rider and so into the ditch, and found myself in the swamp.

Here I knew I was safe, for they could not come after me mounted, and let them come on foot as many as they would I would be a match for them. One did essay to leap his horse over the ditch and straightway floundered in the marsh, where I came upon him and knighted him into the Order of the Cloven Skull.

Then, as I turned about, my legs let down from under me, and I fell into the water of the marsh, and such was my weakness, that I was forced to drop my sword, and crawl still farther into the rushes where, finding a little piece of solid earth in the midst of water and mud and flags, I lay down upon it.

"Blood of my teeth," muttered I, "I am done down."

And then I remembered the blow on the shoulder. I could not find the wound, so that I knew it must be in my back, nor could I tell where it was from the pain, so I lay back and wondered if I should be found or die in the marsh, or if I slept until daylight, would I have the strength to continue after the army. Here I bethought me that the army must be miles away by now and that the French would be pouring back, and that my least fate would be to be taken by them, but beyond this thought I did not go, for the stars swam and the ground swayed, and I lost what little sense I ever had.

THIS battle of Dettingen had been a sad victory; indeed the campaign had been a sorry one from the beginning. For upward of a week we had been eating nothing but black bread and for two days before the battle had eaten no food whatsoever. Our magazines were at Hanau, but the French were between them and us, and our pillaging upon the people had made them drive away all their cattle into the hills. My boots were through to the ground, so that my stirrup iron rested against my bare foot, and not a palm's breadth of my uniform but had a patch or a sewed tear upon it.

Meanwhile the French appeared in strength, and it seemed that nothing could save us from the most shameful and horrible disaster. Howbeit, at this moment our good King George arrived in person and took command, so that we plucked up our hearts and put on a review for the king and his son, the Duke of Cumberland, who had been our commander, that was as good as a man would care to see in a year's journey.

Now then, having renewed our courage, though not broken our fast, we determined upon battle, and to move up the river to Hanau, where our food and clothing were; let the French stop us if they dared. Accordingly, leaving our fires burning, we set forth, but the French had their eye upon us, and no sooner had it come day than their batteries across the river began to play upon us, and the cavalry being upon that flank, the guns wreaked terrible destruction.

We were in sorry straits, for we were on a narrow plain bounded by the Spessert Hills on one side and the river on the other, and there was no room for the proper maneuvering of our army. Moreover, our baggage was between the two parts of the column, and the cavalry which was in the advance, could not retire, but must stand the brunt of the enemy's artillery from the far bank, or else fall back all among the wagons and redouble the confusion there.

However, the wagons were finally drawn forward to a wood, and the foot got into its position somehow, and the battle joined. The advance of the French cavalry forced their guns to cease firing and we, having beaten off some of their attacks, began to have more hope.

I had been side by side with one Nick Dashbaugh, who was my corporal, and we had trotted about and shot off our pistols and cheered and halloed ourselves hoarse, and hoped that we would not get the order to charge, for if we did, our horses would undoubtedly fall dead, they having had so little forage. In the shank of the morning, however, the French *Maison du Roi*, their finest cavalry, made an onset upon our left, where was only two squadrons of Blands, and we received an order to go there hurriedly from the right, which we did, as fast as might be.

"Have a care," said Dashbaugh, beating his horse with his sword to get him into a trot. "We must skirt the morass to get there, and an unwary rider may fall into it. Curse this horse, the crows would have had him long ago, only no crow with any respect for name and family would so much as stoop at him."

In this state of affairs, when the balls were rushing about, and whole ranks going down like swaths of corn before them, the French cavalry and *Grenadiers à Cheval*, with great howling of trumpets, moved out and bore down upon us to crush us. Thereupon the French batteries across the river ceased firing.

"Now then," cried Dashbaugh, who rode at my side, "if the batteries beyond the swamp will but quit, we will have a breathing space, and give those fur-topped French a good account to take home, —— their livers! What would I give for a good ball of Rhenish!"

"Split me!" I cried, "their infantry have appeared! Why they spring from the ground like Jason's teeth!"

"Spring from the ground!" shouted Dashbaugh. "There is a ditch there! They have been in the ditch! Now is the Philistine delivered into our hands. Death of my life! See, they meant to lay us by the heels between the river, morass and ditch, and now their own folly tripped them by the neck!"

Here the trumpets began to blow and we bore down gaily upon the French horse, but they outnumbered us by a good deal, and their horses had been fed with regularity, so that they would respond to the spur, which ours would not, and the upshot of it was that they received our charge, and charged in turn upon us, and overthrew us, and hounded us with whoop and hallo down the river bank, whither we had taken our bloody noses.

Two of the French, Hussars of Berchiny by their green dolmans, set upon Dashbaugh and would have done him down save that I came up at the moment and split one of them to the chin, and the other fled, whereat we set out once more.

"Draw rein, draw rein!" called Dashbaugh, after a time. "They have checked, hold up now, let's not flee like the wicked when no man pursueth."

"We have come upon them from the wood," said I, pointing with my sword to where the red lines could be seen at the bottom of a cloud of smoke. "My Lord Stair and the Duke have brought some order out of the foot and we may give them a stand yet."

So it went for some time, the French attacking with success and anon hustled back again. My own regiment had now a chance to reform, which they did, and joined by a squadron of the Third, we formed line and loosened our sleeves for another go at the monseers. Our foot now debouching from the wood upon the French left, the French began to give ground, and we could see them running by two and threes, out of the smoke and toward the village.

"They are the Guards," cried Dashbaugh, and away we go to prod them!"

Away we went indeed. As for me I could not tell what regiment it was that was breaking, my sole interest being to spur or club or induce by any means the crow-bait that I rode to a trot. As for a gallop, I well knew it was beyond him, he having done all his galloping for the day in saving me from the French after our first onset.

The rest of ours were in no better case, so that we arrived upon the French, some at a walk and a few trotting, but none at the headlong rush at which a charge should be pushed home. Nevertheless, the French guards broke in all directions, throwing away flag, gun, pike and spontoon, and taking to their heels into the Main, which, being not over breast deep, they crossed with a great showering of mud.

We went for them and slashed them and held their heads under water, and had a merry time of it after all, until some of the Gray Musketeers came to their assistance and drove us away again. After that we went far down the road, and coming up on the other side, swung in through the woods after the guns there and spent the rest of the day in harrying the French that we found there.

SO THE day was lost to the French by the moving out of their foot from the covered way when the time was not ripe, and their own guns were masked thereby. So having driven the French from our road the army went forward to Hanau, instead of pursuing, for which we have been taken severely to task. The truth is, however, that, horse and man, we were near starved to death, and could scarce stand, and the one thought in our minds was to get to Hanau, where there was food. Thither the army arrived safe and sound, and so should have I, save that I stayed for loot and was so foolish as to pursue the grenadier officer, and so caught a fall.

Now the army had gone away in such haste, being hungry, that they had taken no thought for the wounded, which duty the French took upon themselves, but I was in a swoon, and so was left for dead, and when I came to myself and heard the French searching I made no outcry, for I thought them to be plunderers, who would slit my whistle for me.

So I lay in the marsh, now myself and now in a swoon, until the second day, when a party of our own who, having fed, drunk and slept, had come back to see if there was anything valuable upon the field, found me and carried me to a cart and so to Hanau, and I thought to have died fifty times upon the way.

We stopped at last and the men coming around to the rear of the cart, we were lifted out and laid down upon the stones of an inn yard. The galleries around became thronged with people and a great crowd clustered about us, holding their children up to see the wounded Englishmen.

There were six of us from the cart and they began to carry us across the yard, head and feet. Finally it came my turn and beseeching them not to leave my sword behind and to be easy of my shoulder, I was borne away. I had no doubt of the place they were taking me to. My nose was guide enough. Some straw had been spread on the floor of the stable and here we were laid down, our only light the flickering lanthorn, which was tied up outside the door lest it set fire to the straw if brought within.

"Here," I called out weakly, "some one fetch me the surgeon, I want a word or two with him."

There was no answer. When they came in with the fourth man I repeated my request.

"Surgeon bean't about," said one of the great louts. "Can't zee un 'til marnin'."

"Listen, ass," said I, "fetch me an officer or some man of authority. I am not a man to be left to die in a cow byre!"

"Can't zee un 'til marnin'," said the man patiently.

Here, had I the strength, I would have cursed that stone-headed grenadier to the tenth generation, but as it was, I lay back until my head stopped swimming. When my sight cleared I beheld a man looking me very intently in the face.

"I have some skill in surgery," said he, "what is it you wish?"

"Be —— to the surgeon and you, too," said I. "Are you English?"

"No," said he, "be —— to you for a whining platelick, but I thought I might lend you some help, hearing you bleating for a surgeon."

"Well, I want no surgeon, only a clean bed, and I have the wherewithal to procure it."

"In that case," said the man, "I can secure you one and a very fine one, too."

"Have on then," I cried, "and get me out of this midden!"

The man went away and presently came back with a shutter and two ox-faced Germans, with whom he conversed as easily in their own tongue as he had with me in English. They hoisted me upon the shutter and we went out of the yard and down a street, and after some turning and twisting, during which I swore profoundly, though the bearers were at great pains to make me comfortable, we arrived at a house, and up stairs. Here the man halted the bearers, and coming close to me, looked at me by the light of a candle.

"You spoke a while since of payment for better lodging," said he, "and I would like to make gentle inquiry as to the extent of your funds at the present moment, before you dirty my clean sheets."

"I would see you in flames first, you harpy," I replied through grinding teeth. "You have my word and will not lose a penny by me."

He spoke to the bearers and they turned about to go down the stairs with me. When they had come again to the house door I called to the owner of the house and inquired of him whither I was being taken.

"Back to the inn," said he.

There being no other thing to do, I put my hand very painfully into my pocket and took out one of the French officer's rings, which I offered to the man. He held it very cautiously to the candle light and turned it over and over.

"Very well," said he at last, "this will do." And he made a sign to take me back to bed.

"Return me my ring," said I.

"It will hardly do for the length of time you will be here, judging by your wound," said he, putting the ring on his finger, "but when its value hath been eaten out, I shall call upon you again."

I swore a little bit here, but, growing weaker with each word, I was fain to cease altogether. While the men who had carried me were cutting off my boots and removing my torn and muddy uniform, the man of the house spoke to me again.

"My name is Gulf," said he, "a surgeon, and well thought of hereabout. Now if you wish me to care for you I will—for a price, of course—and if not, say so and have done, and your regimental surgeon may help you to your grave, which is all that may be expected of one who can command no greater salary than a guinea a week."

I made a sign that he might have the care of my wound, whereat he grinned and, going out, returned with basin, napkin, and divers other things. Then I was put to bed, my wound, which was a deep one under the shoulder, was washed, I was bled, and a fever coming upon me, both from the weakness of my body, having had insufficient food for so long, and having lain in the swamp, I was very ill and for a long time thought the —— would have me after all.

CHAPTER II

OF WOUNDS HEALING

I LAY on my back for a long time, upward of a month, and at last I began to have the better of the fever, and could get out of bed and sit by the window. The house was on a mean street in the lower part of the town, and there was little enough to interest a man looking from the window.

The window of the house opposite was almost near enough to touch, but the room into which it opened was a garret, filled with hides belonging to the bootmaker who owned the house. Farther down was an inn, from whence at all hours came a raucous cry that had disturbed my slumbers many a night, but which I now discovered to be the cry of the maid of the chamber. Hearing the call one morning when I sat at the window, I looked out and perceived a wench leaning from an upper window of the inn, then out with a great bucket full of water into the street, dousing a countryman and his cattle in right royal fashion, whereat the countryman cursed her to the stars, but had nothing for a reply save the banging of the window.

After that, when I heard her cry, "Look out below," as I conceived it to be, I would listen and often hear the cursing of the passerby who had been drenched.

There was another amusement I had, watching the passing of a cart that dripped black liquid into the mud of the way, and slopped and splashed and bedewed all that was near it. I had many a laugh to see the voyagers in the street take to the shops and doorways to escape the cart, and often enough its liquid mud found them in their retreat, and they raised long wails and spoke their minds freely, which made me regret that I had not the German, so that I could understand what they said.

Now when I was well enough to become argumentative I demanded of the man Gulf where were my clothes.

"They were burned," said he. "They were all mud and blood and full of I know not how many noxious vapors, so we had them burned. I have other clothes for you when you are able to bear them."

"Did you find anything in the pockets?" I asked, looking at him carelessly.

"Nothing," said he, "but some moldy bread and a pistol bullet or two."

"You lie!" I cried. "There was a watch, jewels, and the gold buttons and silver gorget of my dress uniform."

"Um!" grunted he. "I did not find them. Some one had been in your pockets before you came here."

"That I might have believed, except that you will remember I got out a ring to pay you, you being in great fear lest your sheets be dirtied by a penniless man."

"Well," he muttered, "what of it?"

"Now, look you, Doctor Gulf, you have saved my life, perhaps, or perhaps you have done what you could to kill me, but our troops are still quartered here and a patrol passes this window on the hour. I have known men hanged for a small trifle such as this, and so will you be, if I cry out to them."

"For a man whose life hath been recently saved, you are a —— ungrateful viper," replied the doctor. "I am no thief, your jewels are safe enough. You may have them and your cursed long sword and cram them down your throat for aught I care."

He then went out and presently returned with the jewels and buttons in a little bag and my sword with its belt wrapped about it.

"I thought you were an Englishman," said the doctor, watching me from the curtain of his eye, "but you must be French."

"How so?"

"Why, these buttons that you say are from your dress uniform are French buttons, of that regiment known as the Grenadiers à Cheval."

"That may be," said I, not having any other reply.

"I have a friend," went on the doctor, "who will not only turn these buttons to gold money, but the jewels as well, and that great globe of a watch you have there, which I doubt is of little use to you."

I told him that I did not care to sell them, for I knew very well I would not get a quarter of their real value. So then he grinned and put back the little sack of buttons and other things, and going toward the door, caught up my sword and made to go out. This, however, he could not do, for I had him by the neck, weak as I was.

"How!" I cried. "How is this? That is my sword, noble doctor. Put it down!"

He squeaked under my hand and dropped the sword.

"Hi!" cried the doctor, "an assault! An assault on an honest citizen. He hath laid hands on me, me that saved his life. The provost shall hear of this, my fine dragoon! The provost shall hear of this, and a fine young man be drummed from guard to guard and beat upon the back for it!"

"Out!" I said, taking up the scabbarded blade and laying it across his back. "Doctor you may be, and my life you may have saved, though I have my doubts of it, but you have been well paid for it and he that touches my sword is in peril of ——'s fire! Now out!"

So he went out and I, what with excitement and exertion, fell back upon the bed and the fever returned again, so that it was a week before I got out again. But all the while I kept the sword in bed with me, so I was much easier in mind than before.

IN A day or so the doctor brought me some clothes, a very modest suit of black, which I put on, and was for going to the part of the town where the troops were billeted, but I was too weak, and could not go beyond the end of the street.

Here I stopped and sitting down upon a doorstep, drew my sword and examined it, for this was the first time I had had an opportunity to test its balance since I had found it. It was a very fine blue sword, made by one Picinino, according to the name on the blade, and of the pattern used by the French horse. The hilt was of basket work, inlaid with silver, with a most excellent covering for the wrist and hand.

The sword was quite heavy and broad, more so than our sword, but the balance was excellent, and it was not difficult to wield. I had never seen a weapon of this pattern before so closely, though there were one or two in our army, come by in the same manner as mine. These swords are also in much use in Scotland, whither they were first taken by members of the Scotch Archer Guard, and then I believe the Clans were armed with them by the French in the Fifteen. Indeed a very fine sword, so fine indeed that my good Doctor Gulf would have stolen it, had I not seen him in the act.

Thus thinking, I turned back to the house, but coming near the door, I happened to note the great boot that hung over the shop opposite and to remember that I was without boots, mine having been cut off me, and being well nigh ruined anyway. Now was a time to have some made so that by the time I was well enough to rejoin, I would be properly prepared.

With this in mind, I went into the boot shop and having made clear to the bootmaker what I wanted, we went together to his loft, so that I might have my choice of leathers. It was hot there, and the smell of the leather making me faint, I stepped to the window to breathe a bit of air. His window was right against mine in the house opposite, and there I beheld the doctor and another man, an ensign of Handasyde's regiment, deep in conversation. Some of it I could hear and other parts of it I lost, but the ensign urged and the doctor shook his head.

"I will not have it," said the doctor. "I have now a great ass of a dragoon here in this house that I thought would have died long ago, but he is still alive and insolent, and while he is here I will be no party to such a plan."

The ensign thereupon muttered some more.

"Ah, and is that so!" cried the doctor. "Is it true indeed? And when? This day week? Ah, say you so indeed, say you so indeed!" He chuckled to make the blood run cold. "Aha! Come again to me, my merry viscount, we shall do business on this day week. We shall have an affair this day week, I assure you. We will have a sticking of pigs to delight you."

Then they went down and shortly afterward I saw why they had gone up into my room, for some four or five men came out of the house and went up the street, their heads very close together, and still bobbing, as if they continued to talk.

The bootmaker now touched me on the shoulder and led me to where he had laid out some fine hides, but I had other things on my mind than boots, so I made some excuse and gave the man a coin. Then I went into the street.

"This day week," I muttered. "This day week. Now what will happen then?"

Whatever it might be I knew it boded me no good, or the doctor had not been so overjoyed. I went down to the tavern, hoping to find some soldier there, but there were none, for it was the hour for exercise, which made it all the stranger that an officer should be in the house across the street. I was forced, therefore, to linger about until the patrol came by, when I asked them if there was any news of the camp, explaining that I was an invalided dragoon.

"We move," said they, "this day week. This order of march is out."

So the army was to move! What then would become of me? I was so weak that it was as much as I could do to walk from one end of the street to the next, so it was clear that I would be unable to march with the troops. I went back to the house and having eaten a meal of meat for the first time in as long as I could remember, and had some wine into my stomach, I plucked up heart.

That very afternoon an officer came to the house with a great scroll on which the names of the wounded who were quartered in the town were set down, and having pricked off my name thereon, he inquired of Doctor Gulf if I would be able to march.

"Not he," said the doctor, looking very sternly at the officer. "I have had the care of many a wounded man in my hands, and sick ones, too, but he is as doubtful a case as I have seen, I promise you. The wound, see you, being of three needles' depth, and the fever on top of that, all after a poor diet and the inaction of a fixed camp——"

"Enough!" said the officer, "he shall be set down as unable to go. This is hot work, to dry the marrow out of a man's bones."

The doctor thereupon set out some wine, so good that it surprized me, and the officer having bounced his against the back of his throat, he went his way.

I gathered my strength very rapidly now and began to go out much more each day. The army marched away, horse and foot, and I was exceedingly lonely after they had gone. I was going back to the house after watching the last victual wagon out of sight, when I bethought to step into the tavern near-by my house and have a little something for my nerves.

There was a window there built out from the wall, that commanded the street, and from it one could see the door of the doctor's house. Seated in the bow window was a man in gray clothes, watching up the street with great intentness. He looked at me startled as I came in, but seeing I was in citizen's attire, he greeted me in German and went back to his watching of the street.

I sat down and had me a glass and looked from time to time at the man in the bow window. Suddenly he jumped up and seizing his stick from a corner, dashed out. I went myself to the window to see what had excited him. Three men had just come from the door of the doctor's house and were walking away. The man in gray hurried after them but when he came to the door, turned sharp and went in, and I could hear the door slam after him.

"Ah," thinks I, "here is robbery or something worse," and thinking of my good new sword, which I called the Picinino, after its maker, I dashed in pursuit of the man in gray.

THE house door swung open to my touch, and there was the doctor and this man in gray, their heads already together across the table. There was a candle between them, for it was already growing dark and by the light of the candle I had a very good sight of the gray man's features. He was the Handasyde ensign that I had seen in my room the week before, when I had been in the bootmaker's garret. He and the doctor looked at me like two dogs caught in the henhouse, and so struck were they that they could give me no greeting. I mounted the stairs to my chamber and took the Picinino from its hook on the wall.

"This," quoth I to myself, "is the last time that I go abroad without my sword about me. There are too many thieves about to either steal this sword while I am gone, or to cut my throat if I go upon the street unarmed."

Then I set down the sword against the edge of a chair and looked out into the street. It was very quiet now that the army was gone and I was quite lonely and cast down. It was clear to me that I would not be able to fight any more that summer, and by the time I was fully recovered the army would be again in winter quarters. Meanwhile I must live on the Frenchman's jewels, and when they were gone I had no idea of what I should do.

Suddenly there was a crash. I had out the sword and leaped half across the room at the sound of it and then I espied a great stone still rolling across the floor, that must have come through the window that I had still left open.

"Some one will smart for this," I muttered, running to the window and looking cautiously out, lest I get another stone between the eyes.

Across the street, before the boot shop, was the man in gray, looking very anxiously up at my window. No sooner had he seen my face than he made a gesture of silence to me, and pointed to the inn. By this I understood him to mean that he had something secret to communicate to me and that he wished me to meet him at the inn. Thereupon, very mystified, I nodded, but he held up eight fingers, by which I understood eight o'clock, so I nodded again, and he went away, waving his hand.

I was at the inn at the hour named and long before, but little good it did me. I heard the clocks all about the city booming and still no man in gray. I began to wonder if it had not been a ruse to get me from the house, but it would avail them little, since my jewels I had upon me and my sword about my waist, and as for the few things in my valise, they were welcome to them.

However, the man in gray came in at that minute and seated himself before me at the table with a smile, being a little out of breath from rapid walking or running. He panted a little and took snuff, and ordered something to drink, while I wondered what an ensign of Handasyde's wanted with me and what he was doing behind the army and in citizens' clothes, being neither wounded or sick, for I had seen him in his uniform a bare seven days before.

"I suppose," began the man in gray, "that you wonder why I have brought you here. I would have told you before, even this afternoon, but I did not know you were English, nor did I know that you were a wounded dragoon until today when the doctor there informed me. By the nails of St. Andrew, but he is a ——!"

"I have thought so myself," I answered, "but he has cured me of my wound, and I must be grateful to him for that."

"Aye," said the other absently, chewing upon his fingers like a man undecided what to do.

"Well, what is your pleasure with me?" I asked, after he had sat for some time in indecision.

"I am trying to come at it," he answered. "You say this doctor has cured your wound. Well, he is like to give you another one that will be quite incurable."

"Ha! How so?"

"Listen! You have marked that his name is Gulf, and that he speaks English as well as any man. Also that he professes to be a doctor. Well, so he may be, but that is not all. He is an agent for Jacobites and he lives here, making a living —— knows how, but mostly by forwarding money and helping this one and that one out of the country and selling news of the British army to the French. One expects to find Jacobites in France and in Italy, but not in Bavaria, and so he is the more dangerous. And among doctors, men can come and go at all hours, and in numbers or singly, and no one will think it odd."

"But what has this to do with me?"

"I am coming to that. I was desirous of borrowing some money from the doctor, that is in a way of speaking, but he would not lend it me. I was in desperate straits, I warrant you. By the bones of Paul, but I was in need of money! He would not listen to me. Well, after I had run myself dry—the —— strike him blind—he suggested to me that in his upper chamber lay a dragoon, that he had expected to die, but that had gotten well. You see he probably brought you to the house, thinking you had means that would fall into his hands if you died.

" 'Now this dragoon,' says he, 'is a most unmannerly, cursing, ungrateful fellow, a true damme-boy, quick to take offense, and overready with a great sword that he carries about with him. Then,' he continues, looking at me very wise, 'this dragoon has about him quite a store of jewels and such which, if I could induce him to part with, might go far toward making up this sum that you wish to borrow.' "

"I suppose," said I, "that he was to keep me indefinitely in his house under pretext that I was too weak to travel and meanwhile possess himself of the jewels one by one under pretext of taking room hire and his fee for caring for me."

"Ah, no," said the viscount, "that would have taken too long. No, the doctor had a better plan than that, which was that he and I were to lay in wait for you, that a dispute would be begun, and that I was to put a foot or two of steel through you, he standing by to witness that I had but defended myself."

Having said this, the man in gray smiled and had himself a drink, while I sat with open mouth, the back of my neck cold at the thought of such treachery.

"A very fine plan indeed," I cried finally, "except that I am not the man to let any one put steel into me, simply because he hath a desire to do so!'

"Umm," said he, "but you are something weak from your wound and the doctor was to stand by with a bludgeon to caress your skull with in case you proved obstinate."

"And your need for money was so great that you were willing to do murder for it?"

He laughed and made a grimace, waving his hand in the air.

"Have I not told you the plan?" said he. "Have I not shown you the snare in your path? Does that look like murder? And yet the need of money is very great with me, very great indeed."

THEREUPON, feeling a certain amount of gratitude toward this young man in gray who had told me of such a dastardly plot, and knowing full well that the store of jewels and buttons was more than sufficient for my needs, I pressed him to tell me what it was that required money so hastily.

"Why, this," said he. "I am a younger son and am called by courtesy the Viscount of Barnet. Now my elder brothers have died off or had their throats cut one by one, and so I find myself suddenly the head of the house. It only remains for me to get to England and claim the estate, going through certain formalities, you know, and then I am a rich man and may have my coach and six to the door at any hour of the day, aye, and outriders to the number of half a score."

"And what prevents your going?"

"Why, man, what I have been telling you. A man can not fly from Bavaria to the sea. It costs money to travel overland and then there is the matter of shipping into England to be thought of, and of traveling to my own country when I have reached the far side of the channel. And truth to tell, I have not a penny."

"Have you vacated your commission?"

At this question the man in gray reddened and looked hastily about the room.

"*Shshshsh*," he whispered in great consternation. "No! This it was that I wanted the doctor to do. I wanted him to get me out of the country and trust me for his fee until I should come into the estate. He does a goodly traffic in getting deserters away and in helping officers who are straitened in their accounts to find freedom, and all such matters as that. But he would not do it and my colonel would not give me a leave, so I must e'en stay behind when the army marches, and take off my uniform."

"And you have no friends who will lend you?"

"Not one. It is a strange thing, but still it is true. A man makes friends in the army by drinking and dicing, and he will find many who will accompany him in either or both, but when it comes to the loan of money and such a sum as I require, that is another matter."

"Well, what was your purpose in telling me all this?"

"Teeth of Solomon! Why? Because you are one Englishman and I another and I will not stand by and see you harmed by any rascally German doctor. If it makes me an enemy of the doctor, and the estate is lost for lack of claimants, well and good, my honor is still clear."

Here he looked at me with such frankness and open-hearted good will that I could have wept.

"Now look you," said I. "One good turn deserves another. I have about me it is true some few rings and geegaws, but whether they are worth much money or not is another matter. Now, if I should make you a small loan of some of these, what security should I have that I should be repaid?"

"The word of a gentleman!" cried he, bringing his hand down upon the table.

At that I laughed in his face. A viscount he might be and I but the son of a seller of books, but that made him no better than I. War is a wonderful thing to show that all men are clay. A duke's face can blanch and his lips pale as well as a drummer boy's. A bit of lead will go as easily into the Duke of Cumberland, who is a king's son, as into the lowest grenadier, who is the son of—— knows who, and both of them will cry out as lustily under the knife that extracts the ball. So I and my comrades had little respect for birth, and for titles as such, unless they were borne by our own officers, of whose bravery we had no doubt. When I had laughed, then, the viscount looked a little abroad, but he took no offense.

"Now attend," said he, "you do not know me, it is true, and it is a difficult thing to collect debts when the channel and half of England is between the debtor and creditor. But listen. You have about you some small jewel or button which you think is of no value. Give it me, and tomorrow I will return to you a sum of money that hath been realized upon it that will astonish you. I have a friend here in the city who is a money changer and I promise you that I can get a nearer value for such as you have than you can get yourself.

"Give me something, anything, and see if I am not sincere. And for the loan that you make me, taking into effect that I have saved your life, I will give you a note of hand, a wadset, as it is called in my country, against the estate, for the value a hundredfold of what you see fit to lend me."

I thought this matter over at some length. If he gave me a paper on the estate, it would do very handily if I should come into a commission, and if I did not, I could discount it at any Jew's. Meanwhile we would try him and, thus thinking, I took out the French officer's watch, for I carried my jewels with me always, for safety, and passed it across the table.

"I will trust you thus far," said I. "Meet me here tomorrow morning at say ten o'clock and let me see what you can do with this. And when was it that the doctor was to do away with me?"

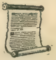
"There was no time set," said he, "because I would not agree to such an arrangement."

"Well, I will have my eye on that old ——, and meanwhile change my lodging. If he tries any chancey work, let him look to his head."

"At ten o'clock," said the viscount, "I will be here. And for this clock, this bellowing ticker, I warrant you that I can get you seven pounds."

So then we struck hands and he went his way and I mine. When I was come to the doctor's house, I cleared the skirts of my coat from the Picinino a bit, for I was minded to have an accounting with Doctor Gulf. I went in and there he was, reading by the light of a candle or two. Before I had time to speak, he reached out a paper to me.

"This was brought here by the provost's officers," said he, "this afternoon, and I would have given it to you, only I did not see you go out."



I TOOK the scroll, meanwhile bending my eye upon him in a very chilly manner, and held the scroll to the candle. I ran hastily over it, for it was closely written and the light was poor, but the upshot of the paper was, that one Hugh Bancroft, of Ligonier's Regiment of Horse, to whom greeting, being by reason of hurts and sickness unable to do his duty with the army, was hereby discharged with honor by these presents and to his home, and to any shipowner or sea captain to whom they might come, he was hereby commanded to carry the body of the said Hugh to any port in England to which they might have business, and set him down dryshod, and look for the defrayment of any expenses by reason of said carriage to My Lords the Commissioners of His Majesty's Exchequer, God Save the King, by his servant William, Duke of Cumberland.

"This is a pretty state of affairs," cried I, "to cast me aside like a broken blade! And what, pray, am I to do for a living now?

And as for hurts, I will be as well as any of them this day month."

The doctor said no word, but sat looking at me and seeing an object for the anger that was in me, I beat my fist upon the table.

"Meanwhile I have a crow to pick with you, my wielder of tortoise-shell, my basin holder. So you would murder me for my money—the wounded man within your doors! And so you brought me here, hoping that I would die on your hands and so you would be my heir! Well, I did not die and I am not to be murdered, and any heirs that you may have, let them look to their estate, for they are shortly to come into it!"

Then I unsheathed the Picinino and let the candle light run up and down the blade.

The doctor, however, showed no fear, only sat looking at me with great disgust.

"What a great dunderheaded fool you are," said he. "What a booby of a dragoon. Hath the Viscount Barnet been trying to borrow money from you? This tale sounds like one from his fertile brain. I brought you to my house to cure you for a price, since a doctor must live by custom, as well as any tradesman. And as for being your heir if you die, that is but the perquisite of any army leach, else wherefore follow the army?

"And as for your fine friend, the viscount, for I see by your face that it was he that set you by the ears, he is the most arrant scoundrel in the armies. He came to me with a long-winded tale of an estate that he had come into and I would have nothing to do with him. And I, having mentioned the fact that you were in the house, he was for my poisoning you and our sharing your money.

"Do you think, ass, that I, a doctor, would have set with you at night, and worn myself to a rag caring for you, had I intended to kill you? Probably you do, for you have little sense. Well, beware of this viscount, for he is a liar and a thief, and a gambler and a wastrel rake—— dog. And as for this leave of absence that they would not give him, it is because he hath more debts than a dog fleas, and his creditors would not let him leave their sight, and went to Handasyde and raised such a coil that the colonel refused him permission to go to England, so he hath now deserted and skulks about the town in disguise, like any lift-purse."

Now this was a plausible tale enough, but I had my doubts of its truth, and I remembered what I had heard the doctor tell the ensign when I had been in the bootmaker's loft. I would know who to believe in the morning for if the viscount kept the appointment and met me with money, well and good, and if he did not, it was no large loss. For the night I would be on my guard, so leaving the doctor, I went to my room and, barricading the door, set up the unsheathed Picinino ready to hand, and so went to bed.

I needed to have no apprehensions on the score of the viscount's honesty, for he was before me at the inn.

"Good morning," he cried cheerfully, "good morning. We have done well indeed. For this watch that we had I have been able to get a matter of seven pound."

Now this was so much more than I had expected that I was quite speechless for a moment and was only able to mumble my thanks.

"Not at all," said he. "Not at all. And now do you think I am to be trusted with a small loan, secured by a wadset on my estate?"

"Hmmm!" said I, bearing in mind what the doctor had told me. "Have you any present debts?"

"Why, yes, a few. What man of mettle hath not? The price of a main or two here, a pair of boots here, a few yards of lace for my uniform somewhere else. All small."

Had he denied it and mumbled and looked blushingly at the table I had known him to be a liar, but his face was so open and frank and his smile so pleasant, that I was forced to believe him and know the doctor for a liar.

"I can not," said I, "loan you a very great sum, or even much of a sum at all, for the reason that I shall have need of perhaps all that I have. I have been discharged from the army and must make the best of my way home, and find some occupation that will give me a livelihood. All of which will take money."

"Aha!" said he, "here is a scurvy trick! Why, you are as well as the next man. I suppose the duke wants no string of wounded left behind to be fed and cared for while the army is in the field, and so hath cast them all aside, to go home and die."

"Probably."

"And I wager that you are no very experienced traveler to make your way alone across half of Europe."

"That is true enough," said I sadly. "It is one thing to travel with a marching column where every night's stage is clearly marked, and the victual wagons parked there, and nothing to do but water horse, eat, and fall down on the ground; and quite another to go alone, and battle with thieving landlords in flea-ridden inns."

"I was coming to that point," cried the viscount. "Now then, I can get you for your jewels three-fold what you can. Moreover, I am an experienced traveler, and have been up and down the highways of Europe for many years. Harky a moment. You shall give me your jewels to melt into good gold, getting three times what you could get yourself, and we shall set out in company, you loaning me half of the sum we realize, against the wadset, and not only that, but accompanying me to England to get your money when I have secured my rights. Is anything fairer than that?"

I said nothing, but thought upon the matter. If the viscount secured for me so much money, more than I could get myself, it would only be fair to lend him a part of it. Then I would have a man to help me all the weary way to England, one who knew the ins and outs of the road, and who could bargain with the innkeepers, aye and curse them, too, and one who would be a companion for me.

In truth I was not looking forward with any great joy to such a lonely journey. Moreover, in case we were set upon by robbers that roamed about the country, or any of the bands of masterless men and discharged soldiers, we could set our backs to each other and show the rogues a good front, which one man could not do.

And added to all this, the viscount had a merry, open countenance, a frank and dancing eye, and my heart warmed to him. Here I bethought me what a tremendous liar the doctor was and that I would quit his roof without the delay of a single minute.

"WELL," said I, "when will we start?"

"Good!" cried the viscount, slapping me on the back. "Good! What a fine fellow you are indeed! Let us start this very night! Why linger? We can go by diligence to Mayence and either get horses there and go overland, or continue by diligence."

"You forget," said I, "that I am a sick man, but lately risen from a bed of pain, and that I could not stand a journey on horseback of such length, nor even one by diligence which, by the look of it, I think would be worse than horseback."

"By the bones of Judas! Ah, true enough. Wither my marrow, I forgot that you had been wounded."

Here the viscount fell to chewing his fingers and beating impatiently upon the table.

"Ha!" he cried, "I have it. Oh, I am a man of resource, I promise you. Why, if we can but get to Mayence, or to Coblenz, we can go down the Rhine on a boat! There are all kinds of boats, trading boats, market boats and, I doubt not, boats for the carriage of passengers, all down the reaches of the Rhine. What better could you ask? A soft bed, no jolting roadway, but a smooth rolling river, a sea voyage, in fact a very cure for all your ailments.

"It will be a little slow," said he ruefully, "but that we must put up with. Well, all the more reason for an early start. Do you go and pack up your effects, give me the jewels, which I will change into money, and meet you here at four o'clock or so. We can then go to the inn from whence the diligence starts, and be ready to leave at daybreak. How is that?"

"It suits me very well, because I have little enough to prepare, having indeed only my valise for baggage, and in it a change or two of linen. I am minded, though, to have this doctor before the justices for trying to murder me, or at least crowd a foot or two of my sword down his rascally gullet."

"No, no!" exclaimed the viscount, "do nothing of the sort. We could not prove a thing and next to jail there is no better place to stay out of than a court of justice. No, no, speak your mind to him, perhaps, give him a taste of the flat of the blade even, for the lying hound he is, but let it go at that. You owe him no money now?"

"Not a farthing. He had of me a ring that was sufficient to keep me for a year, for which consideration he has given me a hard bed and a suit of old clothes, and let my blood regularly, which I could ill afford to lose, having been fed on very thin soup since I was brought in."

"So then, give me the jewels and farewell until tonight."

I took the bag from my pocket and tipped out on the table all the rings, and the silver gorget, and the gold buttons, of which I had not cut off the half, but it had been dark and I hurried. Now of this store I took two rings and put them upon my fingers, for I was a little vain myself, and in addition these would be a goodly reserve, which no soldier should ever be without. The rest I gave to the viscount.

"Now, listen," said I, "you must remember that no one is allowed to leave the city after nightfall, and that if you are not here I shall raise such a hue and cry as would hunt you out of the deepest cellar in the city. You have my jewels, but I have your life, for there are many officers of the army still in the city, and they would be most pleased to find a deserter, to try the strength of the first piece of rope they could come by, by hanging said deserter up to a tree with it."

The viscount jumped a bit at that, like a horse at the touch of a whip. His fingers went to his mouth and his eyes here and there, so that I thought I had him and that he was a traitor indeed. I could feel the quick rage of a sick man sweeping over me and I thrust forward the Picinino with a movement of my haunch. At the clank of the scabbard the viscount turned to me.

"Hold, my bold dragoon!" cried he. "By the hair of Pilate, you are a silly fellow. I am not overset in mind because I meditated you any wrong, but because you have reminded me that there is a rope for my neck if I am caught, and the longer I stay in this city the worse it will be for me."

That was true enough so, apologizing for my suspicion of him, I bade him farewell and went home to the doctor's house. I went in and to my surprize found three men in the room, seated about the fireplace, but they civilly arose and touched their hats to me. They were men of considerable dignity, calm-faced and majestic, though they were very quietly clothed, with no lace upon their hats and with but little jewelry.

"Good day, sir," said the one who seemed from his face and bearing to have the greatest authority. "The doctor is from home and we are awaiting him. Your face is not known to me, but I perceive that you must be an honest man." Here he looked very hard at my sword. "You will forgive me if I don't present these gentlemen to you. They are something careful of their names being spoken in this town of long lugs, even in this house of our mutual friend, and I know that you must have the same feeling. But have a drop of brose with us, while we are waiting for the doctor. Come, a mug here."

One of the men passed a mug and this, being dipped into the bowl of brose, was handed me.

"I will give you a toast," proposed the leader of the three. "The King!"

"The King!" said I. "God bless him."

We showed the bottoms of our mugs to each other and having done so, I set mine down and excused myself, pleading that I had affairs to care for. Thereupon I moved toward the stairs.

"—— death," cried one of the three, his face quite white, "are you the dragoon?"

"Why, yes," said I, startled that this man whom I did not know should be so upset.

The leader smiled calmly.

"We are gentlemen of the medical profession, as you may presume, from our being in this house, and having heard something of your unusual case from our good friend the doctor, my companion here is quite astounded to see you walking about like an ordinary person. Your wound was quite severe, was it not, and complicated by an unusual exposure afterward?"

"It was indeed," said I, "but I have fully recovered, save for this leanness that you see, and a slight dizziness and stiffness of the arm. But happily it is not my sword arm that is affected."

"But might I ask how you came by that sword," asked the third man, who up to this time had not spoken a word.

"I took it from a French officer."

"Ah, to be sure," said the man. "I should have known. Surely I should have known. No other would have worn it so openly."

I now bade these gentlemen farewell and went to my room. There was no conversation from below stairs and very shortly I heard the door softly open, and the three go out. They must have tired of the waiting and gone before the doctor came back.

I wondered for a little time why the sight of my sword had upset them, they knowing very well by what the doctor had told them that I was English and not French. Perhaps they were only curious, never having seen one of that type before, and indeed they were rare enough in the army at that time, though later they came into more general use, many troopers getting them in the same manner as I had gotten mine.

When I had packed my valise and made sure that nothing was forgotten, I went down again and the doctor coming in from the street at that moment, we met face to face.

"Ha!" said I.

The doctor said no word, but looked at me sourly enough. After a time he spoke.

"So this is my thanks, is it? You quit my house the instant you can walk, and leave me your creditor with as clear a conscience as if I were the richest man in Hanau, and not a poor —— of a poverty-ridden leach."

"You have my ring," said I, "and I have not the slightest doubt that you are still the gainer on my account, and will be the more so since I am taking so early a leave of you."

"If you are going in the company of that rakish viscount, I warrant you, you will wish yourself back here soon enough. Before you go, have you in mind any occupation?"

"No."

"There are few that a soldier can find unless he has some manner of trade that he can work at."

"I am wondering what affair it is of yours."

"Well, it is none, I promise you," said the doctor acidly, "but I have some compunction about seeing you starve to death or turned hedge-rover for a living, after I was at such pains to save your life and drag you from the grave. In spite of whatever lie your friend hath told you, I am no murderer, nor a scoundrel either, and so you could see if you had aught in that thick head of yours except galloping and sword rattling and throat cutting. And I have seen somewhat more of the world than you, having been a little longer in it. I tell you frankly that you will starve to death."

"Even so," said I, a little helplessly, "I can see no remedy for it. I can starve to death here as well as in England."

"There is an occupation," began the doctor, looking at me very steadily, "a soldier's business that a man such as you are might find to support himself at; a service where there is little money but much glory, and where a man might win himself a commission, in fact—" a long pause— "he might be commissioned when he took the oath, if he were such a man as you."

"Is that so? Where then? But I can take no service under any of these two-for-a-shilling princes that run about this country of Europe. I have no language but English, which is good enough for an Englishman, and I have no stomach for risking my life, which is the only one I have, in another man's quarrel.'

"Such a service as I had in mind," said the doctor, "is none of these, but the service of an Englishman, the service of one who hath sustained great wrongs, but who is now in a fair way to have them righted."

"Now who do you mean?" I asked, for I was entirely mystified.

"Have you never heard of Charles Stuart?" asked he.

At that I was filled with rage.

"Charles Stuart!" I cried. "I have heard of him, for he hath some pretensions to the crown of England. And if he had any brains at all he would see from the experience of his father in the Fifteen that we will have none of him, a poor foolish family with more bar sinisters to their scutcheon than there are lozenges to a tap room window!"

The doctor leaped to his feet and his chair went crashing to the stones of the floor.

"This is my house!" he roared, "and no man may insult my sovereign beneath its roof. Begone!"

He looked wildly about for some weapon, but there was none to hand, and there was I facing him very easily, for he was old and no match for me, weak as I was.

"Be —— to your sovereign, and you, too," said I, and at that I swung about and went out of the house.

CHAPTER III

OF AN OFFICER AND HIS FOUR TROOPERS

WE GOT away the next morning in sheets of rain. There was a diligence from the upper Main that inned at Hanau and this we purposed to take as far as Frankfort, where the diligence stopped for dinner, it taking half a day to make the ten miles. We had not gone the first mile before we mired, and then, perforce, we must get down and help the men who rode the horses that drew the diligence to pry and pull and shove the wagon out of the mud.

"If this is the way we are to continue our journey," said I, "then I am for going horseback. This is far from my idea of an easy way to travel."

"It might be worse," said the viscount, looking over his shoulder. "We may be able to go by boat from Frankfort. If so, we have not long to bear with this sort of thing."

At last, by dint of great cursing and a pile of rocks, we managed to get clear. The lanterns were hung up, and the horses allowed to breathe. It should have been daylight long ago, but the clouds were so lowering and the rain so heavy that a man could see but a little better than at night. The horses stamped and sniffed and jingled their harness, while one of the drivers knocked the mud from his great boot against a wheel. I thought the horses made considerable noise for their number and said so to the viscount.

"I think we have company," said he, and began to chew his fingers.

The driver by the wheel ceased to scrape and straightened up to listen. There were horsemen approaching, no doubt of it, for we could hear them quite plainly now. The viscount and I made some slight preparation by loosening our swords, and the drivers thrust their hands into their bosoms where they, no doubt, had horse pistols, secured against the wet.

The oncoming horsemen were within an arm's length before we could see them, and then they suddenly emerged from the fog. The pale light gleamed on the bright parts of their horse furnishings and the rain dripped from their cloaks. They were soldiers, and it did not take more than two looks from me to make sure that they were Hanoverian horse.

"A wet morning, friends!" cried the leader of the party, by which token I judged him to be English.

The drivers answered never a word for, being Germans, they did not understand, but I replied and said that it was, and that it must be disagreeable riding.

"Aye," said he, "it is that, and dry work for all the wet."

Here he laughed at his own joke. He kept his hands upon his horse's withers the while he talked and I judged he had his holsters open and kept his hands over them to save the damp from his pistols.

"Are you going far?" he continued.

"A way," said I, "and might I ask where yonder beer-spoiler thinks he is going with that horse?"

One of the horsemen had been passaging his horse through the mud and was swinging around to get between the viscount and myself where we stood in the road.

"Halloa!" cried the officers, "*geht aus* with that *pferde!* I'll do the needful here."

He waved his hand and the trooper backed off to the side of the road and bent his head to let the water run out of his bucket-shaped head-dress.

"The long and short of it is, gentlemen, that we neither of us want to stand in this rain for any length of time, and so if you will just show me a paper or two for authority to be traveling about behind the army, I will not inquire your names, nor your business, but will just be trotting."

"I perceive that you are a British officer," said I, "but you will not object, I know, to telling me why you are holding up travelers who have not been one stage from the city."

Now I cared little enough why he was demanding our papers, but, seeing that he was a young man, much more so than I, I thought I might get him in talk and so lead him to let us pass without further question, for while I had my discharge to show, the viscount had none, and his journey would most likely end immediately.

"I am asking all and sundry for their papers," said the officer, "because I am ordered to do so, and I am ordered to do so because we have news that there are spies and certain French agents about, and when it comes to our ears that a man wearing a sword of very Frenchy pattern hath lain at the inn and taken the diligence before daybreak, it falls within our duty to follow him and have a look at him. And if it appears to us that he is indeed a French agent, then we have a bit of rope, and I doubt not can find a tree to hang it upon."

"You need carry no rope for me," I replied. "This is sufficient for my purposes," and I handed him my discharge.

All the while he was puzzling over it by the dim light, I was thinking rapidly of what we should do if he seized the viscount. He had with him four troopers, which with himself made five, and we were but two and dismounted. However, I was not going to see the viscount hanged, more by token that he had half of our store of money upon him.

"Good enough," said the officer, handing me back my discharge. "They have done you a dirty deed. Meanwhile a word as one friend to another. Get rid of that two stone or so of iron that you wear about your waist. It will mark you as a Frenchman or a Scotch heather jumper wherever you go. Now then," said he, turning to the viscount, "are you a wounded veteran, too?"

"No," said the viscount, "I am a merchant and have been to the headquarters to see about selling some cloth for winter covering for the troops."

"And your safe conduct?"

"Here it is," said the viscount calmly, holding out a paper so that I near fell in the mud from surprize.

"Uh!" grunted the officer, handing it back. "A man of your healthy brisket should be wearing a sword and spilling blood instead of ink. The merchant service is no place for a pretty lad like you."

There was a pause and the drivers muttered impatiently. The horses of the patrol drooped their heads and the water ran from them and from their riders, muffled in their fur trimmed jackets. The officer's body seemed to stiffen and I could see his lips come together in a thin line.

"MY MERCHANT," said the officer suddenly, his voice cold and harsh, "it sticks in my mind that I have seen your face before, and not across the counter of a shop, but across a table. You perhaps remember me. Danby is my name, of Duroures."

"You are mistaken," said the viscount, "I never saw you before."

He was quite calm and had not even changed color. The officer made a slight sign to his men, who moved forward a little and began to spread about us. At that I laid hand on sword.

"I might have believed you," said the officer, sneering, "only your friend here hath been fidgeting wild these five minutes, and now is ready to draw and have at us, though there is no occasion save in his own mind."

The viscount threw a glance at me, an angry startled glance, and the officer thereupon knew that he had us. He lugged out a pistol, but one of his troopers got between him and the viscount, and reached over to seize my companion. The viscount's sword leaped, and the man drew back howling, trying to draw sword with his left hand. The others rushed forward with a great scattering of mud and one went to his knees in the wallow in front of me, nor did he ever mount horse again.

I had scarce plucked my sword out of him and his horse was plunging to his feet, when there came a wild yell from the field beside the road, and the driving of hoofs. I could hear steel clashing where the viscount was holding off two troopers, and the other and the officer, who could not get at me because of the mired horse, stopped to listen.

There was a shout from the two that fought with the viscount and I saw that they had him down and were slashing at him from the saddle. Immediately, maddened by the sight and thinking that I had little longer to live, and regretting that I should die in this reckless brawl instead of on a field of battle, I went for the two men before me, with the Picinino uplifted.

There was no further sound of voices from the field, nothing save thudding hoofs. I had no time for thought as to what they might signify, for the third trooper was upon me and his first slash very near disarmed me. After that I was a little more on my guard and somewhat apprehensive as to how my wind would last, and as to the state of my wrist, after so many weeks on the flat of my back.

I had little work to do, however, for the man that was fighting me had no skill with his sword, only to lash and smash and try to beat my sword out of my hand by the very power of his own arm. His sword was of that curved pattern, such as their horse use, and was not so long as mine, nor perhaps as fine steel.

However, as he was mounted and I not, he had the advantage of me and I was enough put to it to save my head. Also and beyond, the footing was extremely poor, like standing in glue, but I was lucky enough to sever his bridle rein by a lucky cut, so that he had to gather the short end in his hand and get his horse in control again before he could attack me.

I had my back against the diligence as

much as I could, to keep the officer from taking me from behind, and I had some thought of the other two and expected to hear them chopping down on me any minute. For the man that fought with me, I could not reach him with my sword, for I was too busy keeping him from reaching me. However, having got up the end of his rein, he spurred forward against me once more and I, putting the Picinino in guard, awaited him. Of a sudden he gave a cough, and I saw two blades of steel shoot out of his breast and cross each other, for all the world as if he had folded his arms.

It was a long moment before I had the sweat out of my eyes and my dull mind to work and then I perceived that there was a horse lying dead on the far side of the road, and under him the officer of the patrol. My own enemy was in the mire and his horse gone into the ditch, where he was cropping grass. The two that had fought with the viscount lay one atop the other, and it needed no leach to tell that they had drunk their last mug of beer. It was much lighter, and across the field one could see wet woods, and the roofs of a village. As for the newcomers, they were six horsemen, who were plucking their cloaks about their faces and pulling down their hats.

"Good morrow to you, sir," said one, who seemed to be the leader. "I thought yesterday that you were no friend of ours, but since you seem to be unfriends with the British also, I begin to think I was wrong."

I said nothing in reply, but continued to watch him.

"We are not after your purse," said he. "We were going our way peacefully, for we are not men that poke our noses into every corner where we hear swords clashing, but your officer was eager enough to see what made so much noise when we were only hurrying to be shut of you, and seeing us, cried out, and there was nothing to do but battle with him."

"I am grateful enough to you for saving me, though the battle was none of my seeking," I answered him.

"Would you care to join us?" suggested one of the men. "Catch up one of these loose horses and come along!"

The others frowned heavily upon him and muttered that their party was far too large now and the like, but I cut in.

"I am an honest traveler," said I, "a wounded soldier, going to his home by the best means that he can, and I have no need to fly like a thief because I have been set upon by some drunken Germans. I am thankful for your offer, most thankful, but I can not ride with strangers, and I have a companion who is perhaps wounded to the death, who must be looked to. Moreover, if I may say it, I will be much safer by myself than riding in the company of a band of horsemen who set upon a patrol of the allied troops and slaughter them with no apparent reason."

"This is fine talk for one who's wizened would have been slit had we not rescued him!" cried one.

"I am always ready to make good any word of mine, on foot or horseback," I replied.

"So!" cried this one, whipping a sword from beneath his cloak. "Ye ha' come to the right shop for a comb cutting, my cockerel!"

"Not another word!" shouted the leader, spurring his horse forward. "You forget yourself!" he said sternly to his follower.

"Now," turning to me, "where is this companion you speak of? It is possible that we might give him some assistance."

Without a word I led them to where the viscount had lain when I last saw him. The roadway was all stamped and torn, and pools of rain had collected already in the hollows, with little threads of blood in them. The two Hanoverians lay as they had fallen, but there was no sign of the viscount.

"One of these was dead when we came up," said the leader, looking solemnly at me. "Did you see any more when you engaged?"

Two of the company who had the appearance of servants shook their heads, and one spoke in what I took to be French, though it was most harsh and unusual sounding, for that tongue.

"You say you had a companion?" another of the party asked. "And you are very sure he was wounded?"

"I saw him on the ground and these others thrusting at him," I answered. "But where he could have gone unless they stamped him out of sight under the mud, I have no idea."

"It is time we were on our way," said the leader, "and I can give a shrewd guess as to who your friend is. I would be more than passing glad to see him, but he would get himself out of sight like a fox to his earth, the instant he clapped eye on us. I'll mind this meeting."

Here he gave me the very barest sort of a bow and leaving the road for the field, where the going was easier, rode off followed by his company. As for me, I was so weary from the fight and so perplexed as to what had come of the viscount, that I could scarce stand, and went over toward the diligence to lean against it. The drivers were sitting very white-faced on their horses and indicated to me by signs to get in, and they making preparations to move on if I did not, I clambered on. No sooner had the wheels made their first turn than a bale of goods went one way and a roll of hides the other, and the viscount peered out at me very ruefully.

"Now what?" I cried in astonishment. "Are you alive or dead? How did you get here?"

"I am alive," said he, "sure enough. By the skin of Bartholomew, I am very near death, though. I was in the mud and those louting beer swillers poking at me, and one gets down to have a better cut, and so gave me the chance of a thrust."

"Were you there when the six came on the field?"

"I was there when they started to come on, but not when they came. I know them. Furthermore, I know when I have had enough. I got me under a roll of hides."

I had to laugh at this, though I was rather angry, for if the newcomers had seen fit to pick a quarrel with me, and had we had a fight, the viscount under a roll of hides would have been little help. I said as much to him.

"Ah, there would have been no fight," said he. "They were all goggling at you and one was patting the dead hussar's pouch to see if it contained aught to drink, so I just got up into the wagon as fast as I might."

"Do you owe those men money?" I asked.

"Well, not money, but something of the sort," said he, and then would speak no more to me, but held his peace, chewing upon his fingers.

TO BE CONTINUED

PUNCHER'S FANCY

by Harold Willard Gleason

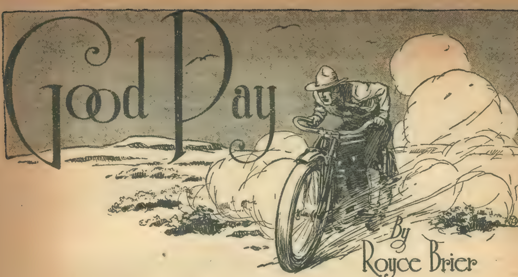
THERE'S jest one spot on earth for me;
No shady nook beneath no tree;
No city, nor no quiet town;
No woods, nor desert red-an'-brown;
No hearth nor home—though home is fine—
This spot I nominate as mine,
The one spot that all others fades,
Is this—the well-known ace of spades!

A puncher, most folks will agree,
Is small shucks in societee.
These dinin'-room-an'-marble-hall
Affairs don't make me yearn a-tall!
But sometimes, when I've got my pay
An' ride to town up Yuma way,
One club would be a savin' grace;
But only one—and that the ace!

I ain't an *hombre* mad for show
Like Faro Mike an' Utaw Joe;
A fancy saddle, well an' fine;
But rings an' sparklers—not for mine!
And yet, beneath the kar'sene lamp
That lights the board in Murphy's camp,
One solitaire would suit me grand;
A di'mond ace—within my hand!

There's many fellers can't abide
This life of roamin' high an' wide;
A red-lipped smile, a blue-eyed look,
Their hats are hung—upon one hook!
Now female women sure are sweet;
To dance with them I call a treat;
To kiss, sometimes, is no disgrace,
But heart-stuff? No, *sir!*—'cept the ace!

And so you see, my wants ain't grand;
Four little items in my hand:
A single club, not swell or smart,
One little, rosy, lonesome heart,
The only di'mond I'll abide,
The modest ace o' spades beside.
But if these wishes should come true,
I'll bet my shirt to see them through!



Good Pay

By Royce Brier

Author of "Driven," "White Challenge," etc.

CERTAIN codes have at us more swiftly in the solemn places of the earth—the sea, the forest, the desert. As an instance, retribution. In the world of men complex forces arrest and ofttimes abrogate the doling out of justice, while the solemn places are pretty generally "good pay."

It lacked ten minutes of nine o'clock in the morning when Gedge stopped in the street between the two school buildings. Gedge was a State highway patrolman. He was a young fellow of twenty-eight, with sandy hair and keen blue eyes, eyes that had as much to do with a ready smile as had his lips.

He smiled now at the school children, and they smiled in return, for to them he represented an authority even higher than the teachers with his brave gold star and his sleek whip-cord uniform. Even as Gedge smiled, a huge green roadster, its pilot the sole passenger, flashed like the shiver of a palm leaf from a side street. There was a scream of burning rubber, and the vision, quite blurred and incredible, of a hurtling white figure that stopped at the curb in the strange, ungainly posture of abrupt death.

All of this in a twinkling. Life seemed suspended, but in all the monumental inertia there was one point of movement; that, the green roadster. It wavered for a moment uncertainly, then with a wail of gears shot away.

The driver of the roadster had the advantage of Gedge, who was obliged to start his motorcycle and to exert caution in threading the street teeming with terrorized children.

Hence the roadster was two blocks distant and rounding a corner before Gedge had a clear street. The officer did not attempt to track the other, but cut across town, and his acuity was rewarded in three blocks by a glimpse of the other. Gedge then closed in, but reached the outskirts of the city before the murderer was again in sight. The roadster crossed the Santa Fé tracks and took to the Cajon Pass Highway.

This was precisely the decision Gedge had hoped the other would make. Not that the man, in making for the Mojave Desert, was running into a dead-set trap perforce. The hour fairly assured him an unobstructed road, and the pace was so swift that for Gedge to pause and telephone ahead was perhaps to lose his quarry on a side road.

The officer fired three times, but it was difficult to get within range. The roadster was a super-car; several times Gedge noted that the driver was clipping off a deadly seventy on the straightaway stretches.

It is twenty-eight miles to Cajon Pass summit, and fifteen more to the end of the pavement at the little desert town of Victorville. There the transcontinental highway swings north to Barstow. But another road takes a course southeast, crossing the trickle that is the Mojave River, flinging itself over gaunt twin peaks and out upon the immeasurable desert floor.

The Barstow highway with its railroad towns meant to the man capture or flight to the inhospitable mountains—the other commanded. He had cast the die irrevocably. He might have stopped at the school and taken two years. But with the newspapers crusading, with public opinion aroused, it was win now or meet the end. Fortunately, these were stolen license plates, the man thought, smiling coldly in the winging moments.

In Victorville he slewed from the pavement into the sand of a side street to avoid the main corner of the town, and elude pursuit from more than this —— dogged officer.

Gedge attempted to follow and spilled, breaking a collar bone. He was up in a moment, and saw his prey crossing the bridge at The Narrows and climbing the serpentine road up the twin peaks. Gedge was sick and dizzy, but he mounted his undamaged motorcycle before the few straggling townspeople caught the significance of the chase. He had meant to pause a moment and enlist automobile aid, but the force of his fall had stripped him of ordered thought, save the one obdurate mind that he was on an inexorable mission.

Gaining the pass between the gaunt twin peaks, Gedge beheld the roadster leaving the winding hillside road and hurling a cyclone of dust behind as it fled out into the desert. The dust settled reluctantly; save for that, Gedge might have done better. The road was fairly hard, with few sand holes, though it wound through the manzanita and buckthorn without apparent purpose.

The rider clung precariously to his handle bars. Savage thrusts of pain in his shoulder seemed to infect him with their own madness. White-hot stabs of pain in his eyes seemed to illumine the dust-choked roadway that he might stave off ultimate disaster.

One dry-lake bed and Gedge was done! But the roadster turned to the left at a fork in the road; Gedge caught glimpses of it and its furious dust cloud winding up a sloping mesa. He saw by his motorcycle clock that it was ten o'clock; he was astonished at the dragging of time.

The road grew worse. Even as Gedge despaired he fought desperately on. The cylinders of his machine smoked in the morning heat and seared the flesh of his knees, but he would not quit. He could not quit—a sob shook him—he could not quit! This seemed a fearful dream, this smothering blanket of yellow, swirling, torturing, like tongues of yellow flame, forced by a hurricane blast, under a yellow sky.

Gedge sobbed again in agony, but he thought of the mother of the little girl in San Bernardino. He thought of the world of men, of the complex forces that arrest and ofttimes abrogate the doling out of justice—yellow dust, for instance, and the failing sinews of a man, and a super-car streaming through the golden morning.

He did not think it in just that way, but all of those words were in his simple speaking of God's name.

Suddenly the dust was dissipated, and he saw the roadster a quarter of a mile ahead. They were crossing a hard lava outcropping. Madly Gedge turned the throttle bar. He gained, drew within fifty feet of the roadster and again opened fire with his automatic.

His shots were wild. They were making perhaps thirty miles an hour. Abruptly the big car seemed to reverse its movement. Gedge in a twinkling perceived the illusion, saw the man had applied his brakes to wreck him.

Gedge could not stop, but he could do better for his adversary than hit his tire rack. He saw that in a flashing moment, and swung slightly to one side. There was a deafening crash as the motorcycle tore the right rear wheel from the roadster, and there was a flash of light in Gedge's brain more dazzling than any desert sunlight.

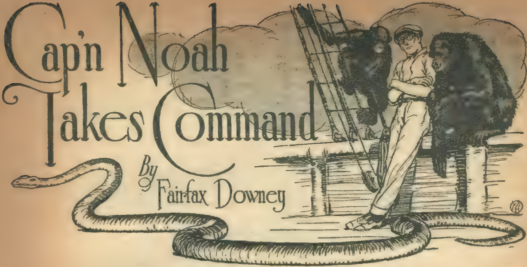
Gedge regained consciousness some hours later to behold the man lying not far distant. He blinked stupidly, for the man was dead. Not until he had bathed his head with water from the radiator did he divine the truth. Then he saw the crushed form of a horned rattlesnake.

The man, Gedge thought, must have been so terrified he had even neglected to kill Gedge.

Then Gedge stared at the sand and laughed crazily. It was of course absurd, this imagery that came to him, for the bite of the rattler must have been only incidental to molestation—mother love is not an ophidian trait. Yet he knelt unsteadily and inspected more closely a rock which had been overturned, and blinked his eyes at the imprint of a foot which had inadvertantly ground into the earth two tiny sidewinders no longer than pencils, young of the serpent which had visited death upon the vandal.

Cap'n Noah Takes Command

By Fairfax Downey



Author of "To Beat the Band," "Heads in a Noose," etc.

DISAPPOINTMENT contended with elation in the bosom of Pethbridge Barclay, apprentice naturalist. It was a regular main bout of a soul-struggle, mirrored in the pair of frank blue eyes in horn-rimmed showcases and proven by the slump of the usually well-squared back and muscular young shoulders.

Pethbridge's adequate feet pressed longingly on the *terra firma* of British Guiana. He shuddered as he gazed out across the harbor of Georgetown upon the bounding, the awfully bounding main he had so recently quit. Must he put to sea again so soon? Half hoping he had misapprehended, he moved farther out of the sun's glare and read through again the dispatch from his idolized chief.

> You can not, therefore, join me at this time in the interior. The fruits of the first expedition, rare specimens indeed of South American mammals, reptiles and birds, may not long survive their cramped temporary quarters in Georgetown. Advices from the zoos, which are the consignees, report them anxious to receive the fauna. And we have good reason to fear the rivalry of Harbeck, who is said to have made some very successful collections and may anticipate us in the markets.
>
> Secure shipping at once, my boy, and escort the specimens to New York with all the care for which your training qualifies you. Improve your mind with study of them *en route*, and be assured that you shall form a part of the next expedition which coincides with a leave of yours. I place this considerable scientific and monetary responsibility on you with confidence.
>
> Believe me,
>
> Your Friend and Mentor,
>
> JOAB ESTILL.

The reader crumpled the letter into a pocket of his linen suit. He eyed the Demerara River, that trail into the mysteries and fascinations of the jungle, and again he eyed the obnoxious ocean. Disappointment scored a knock-down blow on the solar plexus of the elation of responsibility.

"Drat it!" swore young Mr. Barclay fervently, and moved off, on still uncertain sea legs, toward a café for something medicinal to settle his stomach and his disappointment.

Secure shipping—that was the matter he must first attend to, he mused, as he sat at a table and sipped a beverage recommended as sure to settle anything. After all, there could not be a whole lot more to that than hiring a taxi. You just went down to the waterfront and picked out a steady, comfortable-looking craft, asked the captain if she rode easily and what the charges were, loaded on your baggage, got in and sailed.

Pethbridge prepared to go and to do so. He gulped the rest of his drink hastily. It burned distressingly.

At the pained expression upon the countenance of Pethbridge, a voice croaked from the next table—

"Beware of rum."

Pethbridge saw a small, slight man with a weatherbeaten face grown sallow. He wore a goatee, a sad expression and nautical attire.

"Beware of rum, young feller," he croaked again.

"Thanks awfully. I will next time," the apprentice naturalist replied gratefully.

"Rum's ruining me," confessed the stranger. "I was goin' to take on a cargo of it here. Planned to put out loaded to the scuppers. Couldn't have held another barrel."

"And you were just warning me against a glass of it!" Pethbridge gasped.

"I don't drink. I meant, ship it," the other said sadly. "But I sez to myself: 'Cap'n Riker, if you load the *Ossa* with Guiana rum with that crew you got aboard her, there'll be —— and homicide on the high seas. For you rightfully and wisely know—and you've plainly informed the crew 'emselves, that they're the most——"

At the flow of red-hot invective and masterly characterization that ensued, Pethbridge's ears burned worse than his throat had. Finally the conflagration ceased, the little man stopping for breath.

"You mean to say they are tough," Pethbridge ventured.

The captain answered even more sadly—

"That was my general drift."

For several minutes young Mr. Barclay was lost in reflection. Then he asked—

"Captain, are they kind to animals?"

The little man took a deep breath. He seemed about to enter on further reference to his crew and Pethbridge drew back nervously. But he remarked laconically—

"Maybe that's a good point I overlooked."

"I ask because I need a boat," the young scientist explained.

"The *Ossa's* as trim a little schooner as you'll find."

"I'd like to encourage a good boat."

"My ship's free. As I told you, I wouldn't load a rum cargo. Now can't get nothing else. I'll sign reasonable."

"All right. I'm in charge of a load of animals collected by Mr. Estill, the noted zoologist, to be delivered as soon as possible in New York. But are you sure your crew won't give trouble?"

The captain drew his small frame erect.

"I'm not feeling at my best—touch of the fever you get in these parts. And I'm not heavy-fisted," he acknowledged. "But with no rum aboard but jest a cargo of perfectly nachural animules that ain't pink striped or purple polka-dotted, I'll guarantee to control my men by word of mouth, young feller."

"I don't doubt it for a minute, sir," Pethbridge hurried out. "Let us make the arrangements."

They did and soon were on their way through the sun-baked streets to the wharves, where the prospective supercargo desired to inspect the broadness of beam of the *Ossa* and note her promise of stability before closing the deal.

II

THE good ship *Ossa* was working up into the Caribbean after some very handy sailing aided by winds which were favorable but almost too boisterous in the opinion of Mr. Pethbridge Barclay, naturalist. That ordinarily hale and husky young man found himself exceedingly indisposed at the slightest motion of the ship and spent all possible time flat on his back in his bunk. With heroic devotion to duty, he roused himself ever and anon and drove himself down into the hold to see to the welfare of his zoological charges. From that ordeal he emerged pale and wan but with a sense of pride, for thus far in the voyage he had lost only a toucan and a pair of swimming marsupials. That he estimated as a creditable performance for any naturalist who felt as unnatural as he did.

Pethbridge also attended the bedside of Captain Riker, who had succumbed to the ravages of the fever he had contracted in Guiana. While the little man was not dangerously ill and seemed to know what remedies to use, he was very weak and his recovery slow. However, he would occasionally summon the boatswain, "Bean" Bracket, to his cabin and roar forth a vividly garnished order.

"Just to let 'em know I ain't lost my voice," he explained to Pethbridge. "Mr. Storrs is a capable mate when it comes to navigatin'. He'll bring you and your zoo to New York all right. But he's too confounded mild and soft-spoken to put the fear of a righteous wrath to come into the sin-sunk hearts of this —— bent and long overdue collection of cutthroats of a crew."

"I trust you overestimate their tendencies," Pethbridge assured worriedly. "But I must confess I have my misgivings, too. That fellow they call 'Red' and that 'Spanish Joe'— I fear they are hard characters. And I doubt that they like my animals."

"You doubt right. They don't like 'em a little bit. For why? Because they keep thinkin' of the rum that might have been stowed in the place of all them watch-you-call-'ems."

"I simply ignore them. I don't enter into conversation with them."

"Hold close to that course, young feller. You're as soft-spoken as Storrs, only worse. Keep 'em away from the medicine-chest rum and watch out for Bean Bracket, the bosun, who's got some brains. Well, what is it, mister?"

Storrs, the mate, had entered the cabin. He spoke up hesitatingly:

"Cap'n, a committee of the crew has been to me to complain. Say they can't get any sleep, what with the howlin' monkeys and the screechin' what-nots makin' the night hidjous."

"It is ——'s own racket," the captain admitted. "Can't pipe 'em down none, young feller, can you? No? I s'pposed not. Well, Mister, you tell that committee to tell the crew with my compliments to ——"

The mate hastily interposed. "They say they'd like a little medicine to make 'em sleep, Cap'n."

"Medicine? Huh! Rum!"

The captain rose on his bed of sickness and commenced a smoking, sizzling biography of his crew. He fastened on them the seven deadly sins in rapid succession. He affirmed there wasn't a law of God or man that had not suffered a compound fracture at the impious hands of each and every one of them. He cast sinister reflections on their genealogy for generations back. He inferred that a snake's stomach was a lofty affair compared with their mental and moral characteristics. He conducted them on a sort of Cook's tour of Dante's Inferno and proclaimed they would distinctly lower the tone of the place.

"And don't let 'em get at that rum in the medicine chest!" he finished as he sank back exhausted on his bunk.

THE little captain's voice had been stentorian to reach a possibly listening crew and regulate their morale accordingly. But he had neglected to pipe down in time when he referred to the dangerous item in the medicine-chest. Forgetting himself in the artistry of his invocation, he had as good as issued an invitation.

Pethbridge feared the worst and confided his fears to Storrs, who only shrugged his shoulders helplessly and bent over his charts. That afternoon, after the mess-boy had reported the skipper weaker, the crew made bold to realize the fears of the naturalist for him.

The first intimation he had of the calamity was a hubbub forward which resolved itself into a chant by the educated boatswain. Bean was howling gleefully:

"Fifteen men on a medicine-chest.
Yo-ho-ho——"

Mr. Storrs began bawling querulous orders at the crew, who paid them not the slightest degree of attention but began broaching more of the kit's stimulant, evidently ample and lusty. The captain tossed fitfully and impotently in his bunk and, nothing preventing, high carnival was held on the high seas.

The seas were certainly too high for the comfort of young Mr. Pethbridge Barclay. He felt disinclined to interfere with the crew for more reasons than that he was without authority. Besides, what ever could he say to them, if he should speak out? How could he vie with that vocabulary of the captain's?

The sound of revelry by afternoon increased and then the mischief in the drunken crew began to break loose. They went below to the animal cages. Soon the rigging was full of howling monkeys and equally howling sailors. Bean and Red mounted llamas and attempted to race the creatures around the deck. Spanish Joe, clutching his sheath knife, was in full pursuit of a rhea, proclaiming aloud his desire for a chicken dinner.

It was a most distressing sight from the zoological standpoint which met the startled eyes of Pethbridge as he stared out of a cabin port.

What could he do? What could he say that those wild men would listen to? They knew him as a silent fellow; he had purposely kept his scholarly language very quiet. No use asking the captain what to say. His delivery wouldn't be convincing.

Suddenly a loud chorus of squawks, bleats and screeches made Pethbridge the master of his *mal de mer* and the captain of his tongue. He leaped through the cabin door and placed himself between the terrified rhea and the bloody-minded Spanish Joe. Dashing up on a llama, Bean Bracket gave a yell of delight.

"Why it's Cap'n Noah himself!" he cried.

"Come on, Cap. Make this —— circus of yours do its tricks!"

The naturalist expanded his husky chest.

"Unhand that llama, you!" he roared. "You pied wagtail! You Talamanca jay, you! You spectacled parrotlet and pink-necked fruit pigeon of a Barbary ape!"

Bean gasped and fell off the llama to the deck where he seemed unable to rise. Pethbridge thrust his face toward the gaping Spanish Joe, took another long breath and began again.

"You black-headed manniken!" he insulted. "You gray shrike and kankajou. If you'd harmed that bird, I'd have knocked you for a row of common macaques. You son of a Cereopsis goose, you haven't got the sense of a groove-billed ani!"

Spanish Joe gave way muttering. Warming to his work, Pethbridge turned on the surprized Red.

"There you are, you reddish seedeater!" he stormed. "You crimson pileated finch, you Mexican red-bellied squirrel! Speak up, you chattering chachalaca, you blue-footed Galapagos booby! You're nothing but a yellow-faced grassquit—that's what you are. And if you don't like the name, I'll classify you further."

Pethbridge felt Storrs at his elbow.

"Rake 'em with just a few more of them wonderful cusswords, Mister," begged the mate in admiring tones. "If there's any argument left after that, I'll end it."

He laid his hands on a pair of heavy revolvers in his belt.

The crew shrank back, sobered, sheepishly.

"The rest of you wombats, bandicoots and white-faced bulbuls, get those animals back in their cages and handle with care," Pethbridge finished strongly.

Boatswain Bracket rose from the deck to lead the work of recapture. On his hard face was stamped deep respect and wonder. He touched his forelock to Pethbridge.

"Aye, aye, sir, Cap'n Noah," he said.

III

THE *Ossa* sped rapidly on her voyage northward, rapidly and smoothly to the good content of her zoologist - supercargo. He spent the long days in the care and study of his dumb charges, and none of them was dumber than he. He had spoken to the point and was generally acknowledged to have said several mouthfuls; wherefore he rested on his laurels and preserved a most golden silence.

Evenings he immersed himself in books from a long black box placed in the main cabin, learned treatises on zoology and kindred natural sciences. The horn-rimmed eyes seldom glanced up. Lips moved in the commission to memory of the names of species which might come in handy in the event of need of another verbal bombardment.

Captain Riker, now up and about, bent on the student a look less friendly, a regard decidedly jaundiced. This youngster had beaten him at his own game. True, he had risen nobly to an emergency, but he need not have hog-tied and horse-whipped the king's English in such a completely superior and original manner that the crew had no respect any more for their skipper's old-fashioned, long-tried cussing. This voyage with a lot of freak animals wasn't paying so much that it was worth the loss of prestige. Maybe that cargo of Guiana rum would have been better after all.

"What are you all the time readin' for, young feller?" the captain asked sourly.

"To improve my fragmentary knowledge of the animal kingdom, Captain," Pethbridge answered serenely. "Now here's an interesting bit about the giant whydah——"

"To —— with the giant what-is-it!" the skipper fumed.

"Why, Captain, it's a very interesting bird. Perhaps you are keener, though, on something like the Tasmanian Devil. Those little fellows may bring as high as three hundred dollars in the zoo market. They——"

"I ain't strong for your outlandish animules, young feller."

"Perhaps if you knew a little more about them, Captain," Pethbridge suggested gently. "Now there's the Lapland lemming. Extraordinary creature. I've made up a little rhyme about him—at once amusing and scientific. Allow me to quote:

"Let's not be too quick in condemning
That queer little creature, the lemming.
He migrates till he
Goes and drowns in the sea,
Without any hawing or hemming."

"Do you like it?"

"No!" the captain snorted.

He had the look of a man who has swallowed a lighted stick of dynamite and is endeavoring to smother the detonation.

"But I would like it if you would come out on deck and support me," he said. "This —— crew takes no stock in what I say any more unless their 'Cap'n Noah' is around to back me up. A fine state of affairs!"

Pethbridge followed him on deck. They were not far off the New Jersey coast now. A fleet of ships hove to had been sighted.

"The rum fleet!" the captain exclaimed incautiously.

The word flew around like wildfire. The crew crowded to the rail, restlessly and thirstily. The man at the wheel gradually veered the *Ossa's* course toward that ribald sisterhood. Riker looked craftily at Pethbridge who stared back at him, speechless. Soon the *Ossa* was within hail.

"Ahoy, the schooner," halooed a buccaneer from the nearest sloop.

The captain answered the hail. The crew licked their lips at the sight of the cases piled high on the deck.

"Wanta make some money?" invited the genial pirate. "Just lie to for a couple days and serve as a store ship. Yacht's due in here from the Bahamas tomorrow loaded deep with stuff. She can't stick around. Let her transship to you. All you gotta do is hold it for a day or so till we kin run it ashore. What say?"

The captain's eyes glinted.

"You're on!" he shouted back; then began to bark out orders.

With an outburst of frantic cheering, the crew sprang to obey. In a trice, the *Ossa* was hove to, admitted to membership in the rum fleet.

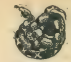
Poor Pethbridge only found his tongue when he was alone again in the cabin with the captain.

"This won't do," he protested indignantly. "You're getting us into all kinds of trouble. Remember the rum! Outside of that, it isn't fair to delay a day longer making port. I've lost several mammals and birds already in this long voyage. More will die every day more at sea. My chief trusts me to get them through. This will ruin my reputation!"

The appeal in the eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses was pathetic. But the captain only cackled.

"Go jump in the ocean, young feller," he urged. "Whatchuh goin' to do about it, huh, Cap'n Noah?"

The not inefficient fists of young Mr. Barclay clenched, but he held his peace. He was well practised in that.



BY DUSK, the crew had borrowed a supply of the liquid refreshments which so copiously surrounded them and were beginning to let 'er roar after a long abstinence. Adopting a *laissez faire*, not to say a let-her-rip policy, Captain Riker retired to the smug seclusion of his cabin.

In the shelter of a companionway, the highly worried Pethbridge met the reticent and retiring mate Storrs. From the deck rolled in the raucous racket of a sea-chantey.

"This is terrible, Mr. Storrs," Pethbridge declared. "It isn't square."

"You're right it's not," was the comforting reassurance of the mate. "The old man's gone back on the articles he signed. We all stand to land in the brig or worse."

"It's splendid to have you feel this way about it," the naturalist said.

"But what can us two do?" the mate groaned. "Even with your command of bang-up casswords, Riker skippers this ship and the crew's fast gittin' orey-eyed."

"We'll fix the captain first," Pethbridge asserted with sudden determination. "Come on!"

The struggle in the cabin was brief. The little captain was helpless in the muscular arms of young Mr. Barclay. Storrs devoted all his attention to the gagging.

"I'd better make it three layers of gag," the mate grunted. "What he wouldn't say if he could! Whew!"

"I'm tying him up tight," the other added. "If he ever gets loose, he'll have every rum runner in the fleet down on us."

They laid the trussed-up Riker close against the outer wall near the door, so that a glance in would not discover him. Pethbridge moved his big black box over in front of him.

"Now for the crew," Storrs urged. "And quick, while they're still conscious and can work the ship in. You tell 'em, Mr. Barclay. I'm comparative tongue-tied."

Squaring his shoulders, the naturalist strode out among the roistering crew and opened on them the floodgates of his scientific vocabulary, not neglecting the Latin. It was masterly and withering and the crew tat silent under it while it played about heir heads.

But in the first pause, Bean, the boatswain, broke in with a crafty leer:

"'S'all right, ol' man Noah, but we got orders from the real Cap'n. Who the —— are you, anyway? —— animul keeper. —— zoo-ol—zoo-ol—zool'gust. What call you got to call us names like that? Where's cap'n? Where's real cap'n? C'mon, boys, they put him away!"

"My ——! I forgot my guns!" Storrs muttered in Pethbridge's ear. "Beat it for the cabin!"

They ran for it and would have made it with time to spare. But Spanish Joe had been behind them. He was there first. Grinning, he placed his bulk in front of the cabin door and raised one hairy arm like a hammer.

Very deliberately, Pethbridge removed his horn-rimmed glasses. Then he stepped in and swung.

Spanish Joe's head snapped back. He slumped to his haunches on the deck like a trained bear. An expression of dazed surprize spread over his face. It was duplicated by one on Pethbridge's.

Pethbridge and Storrs leaped inside, but in the gloom the hooked-back door could not be released before the rush of the crew had wedged Bean and Red in the narrow doorway.

Then Pethbridge thrust forward the big black box, grasping its lid.

"Get out," he yelled. "Or I'll let every snake in here loose!"

Seemingly from the box a terrific hissing and sputtering arose.

With a shriek of terror, Red flung himself back into the press of the crew behind him. They tumbled over each other in wild disorder.

But Bean Bracket, the educated boatswain, stood his ground. His still keen eyes had pierced the shadows of the cabin. He bent a sinister, knowing look on his adversaries.

"You can't fool me," he jeered in a sobered voice. "Thought I was boiled, didn't yuh. Not yet, not yet. I want to tell yuh I know a snake when I don't see one—if you get what I mean. Say, what's that heap there?"

The heap proceeded to identify itself. Having bitten through his gags, Captain Riker became loudly and luridly articulate. Bean stepped forward and unbound him.

"Lock up those two ——!" the captain commanded hoarsely. "They'll hang for mutiny!"

"Aye, aye, sir," the boatswain replied. "And now, sir, perhaps something to revive you after that experience——"

The cabin door slammed on the naturalist and the mate. The key grated in the lock. Sounds of redoubled conviviality rolled in in waves. The captain and the crew were toasting each other.

"This is terrible!" Pethbridge groaned. Storrs nodded a sad assent.

The racket without increased. They had reached the singing stage again. Above it all rose Red's bull bellow:

"I went to the animules' fair.
All the birds and the beasts was there.
The ole baboon by the light of——"

"Mr. Storrs," Pethbridge cried in agonized tones. "That means they'll soon be at my animals again."

Evening wore on into black night. The uproar increased. Decks were pounded by feet in a bacchanalian rout. Somebody took up the song again—

"I went to the animules' fair——"

They danced to it, chanted it at the top of lusty lungs.

"The monkey he got drunk
And climbed up the elephunt's trunk——"

To the listening prisoners came the raucous shout of the educated boatswain:

"What ho, m' hearties! Below, below, belay. Monkey'sh not drunk yet. Can't climb elephunt's trunk 'thout a drink. Below decks to animals' fair!"

The creaking of hatch covers came to the ears of Pethbridge. He strained in vain at the stout cabin door.

But the key turned in the lock. In the doorway stood the captain, frightened, sobered.

"Stop 'em," he begged weakly. "Gone too far. Awful sorry."

Pethbridge sprang on deck. At his command, the captain and the mate flung on the hatches, battened them down. Peering through a ventilating shaft, he saw the one lantern of the roistering crew wink out. The blackness of the hold caused a sudden hush except for the noises of the various animals.

In a stentorian voice, the naturalist hailed.

"Below there," he shouted. "Careful of those cages. I won't be responsible for what happens to you. You laughed at the idea of snakes in the cabin. But it's the truth you're keeping company down there with fine specimens of an anaconda and a boa constrictor."

"The boas have no poison fangs, but their powers of crushing are great. They are able to swallow whole animals, the size of a goat or so. I wonder who's going to be the goat down there. The boa constrictor attains a length of twelve feet or more, but the anaconda is much larger. The anaconda with its prey——"

From the terrifying darkness rose a few whimpers of terror, then some maudlin cries for mercy, some thick-voiced promises to behave. But Bean Bracket laughed.

"That you, Mr. Bracket?" Pethbridge spoke up quickly. "You won't fail to appreciate meeting the little family of vampires in your midst. I noticed their cage was not so secure the other day. You know the old superstitions about their being the ghosts of terrible women who rise from the grave and drain the heart's blood of men. 'A fool there was', eh? Just superstition, of course. These are only blood-sucking South American vampire bats. They only fasten on your throat when you're fast asleep. Everybody down there feel good and wide awake?"

With the moans and pleas of the crew mingled the weird, eerie jungle cries of the animals. Again the voice of Pethbridge broke in and dominated it all with some nerve-wracking bit of his naturalistic lore.

After an hour, a pale and shakey crew were released. Unsteadily they worked the *Ossa* into port.

Her master, Captain Riker, next day entertained ship news reporters who came for the story of the valuable zoo consignments.

"All credit's due to the young feller in charge of the animules," the captain announced magnanimously. "It was him tamed one of the roughest crews that ever sailed. Why, the night 'fore we made port, he had 'em all listenin' to bedtime stories!"

Pards

Conclusion

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Bush Lopers," "The Homesteaders," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

FRANK ELLIS woke up one bright morning in California Gultch to find himself a total failure. Through the winter of 1862 he had trailed from one holding to another until the gold mining season was at a close. He was penniless, and he had a sister back east who believed him a great success. There was nothing left for him to do but take a job over the lunch counter of the Great Western Hotel, under the hand of George Skillings, boss.

As he was serving his first meal to a group of miners, traders and mine employees, he unconsciously burst into a plaintive song.

"Stop that —— racket," the boss roared.

From that time on he was the "Singing Pilgrim."

The Pilgrim became a drawing card. Nate Goss, the gambler; "Rabbit," the Indian, doomed to death by his tribe on a charge of killing a brother tribesman; "Ancient Days," an old-time placer miner; "Bones," a man with a delusion of great prehistoric beasts in the gulches—all fell into the lure of the Pilgrim's voice.

"Whip King," reputed to be the best wagon-train boss between the river and the coast, arrived in the gulch with a starting crack of his monstrous whip. He had no special destination, no special enemies, and he cared little for firearms. But he proved to be the friend of many restless men who fought constantly. Many was the time that his long lash sent men, armed with six-shooters, cowering in the corner.

With the season almost ended and too many men finding almost no gold, things in California Gulch became a bit thick. Goss had a fight with Charlie Dodge, the monte gambler, as a result of unfair play, and finally the Pilgrim fought with his boss. The fight itself was inconsequential, but a threat loomed in the background when the Pilgrim swore vengeance.

That night Skillings, the boss, was found with a knife in his heart, and the Singing Pilgrim was missing from California Gulch.

EXAMINATIONS of Skilling's effects brought to light counterfeit money amounting to twenty thousand dollars. The mob, almost in a frenzy, shouted—

"Hang the Pilgrim! Hang the Singing Pilgrim!"

And added to this they accused Goss of being implicated in the counterfeiting gang, giving him a chance of leaving town immediately or risking the circumstances if he stayed. He left.

With the aid of Rabbit, the Pilgrim stole away in the night, an innocent outcast. For many days they wandered, until the Pilgrim lost the Rabbit when pursued by the Utes, the tribe of Indians to which the Rabbit belonged. Certain death threatened the Pilgrim. He was saved miraculously by the reappearance of Rabbit, whom the tribe worship as a god, calling him, the Walking Dead Man.

An outcast by the name of Lomson who had affiliated himself with the tribe also came into the camp. Trouble began anew. By mistake the Pilgrim and Lomsom went into the sacred medicine tent to smoke a pipe of tobacco out of the rain. The Indians found them there, and in his excitement, the Pilgrim put a small idol in his pocket which he had in his hand at the time of the Indians' entrance.

The discovery of the loss of the idol put the camp in a turmoil, the Pilgrim was gain accused and threatened with death. Court was held, and Rabbit promised that the idol would be restored with the release of the Pilgrim. He was unsuccessful, and only through great stealth and cunning did the Pilgrim finally escape from the camp of his enemies.

BUT his escape only threw him into more violet hands. Exhausted from travel and want of food, the Pilgrim came to the cabin of Jonathan Leaper, an outlaw, who offered to keep him over night. Bill Waggle, also spending the night there, recognized the Pilgrim but was turned out.

The reason for this came to light the next morning when Leaper robbed the Pilgrim, bound him to a mule and turned them both loose on the wild, rocky passes.

After a long period of intense suffering, the Pilgrim was rescued by United States Marshall Farnham, and together they went back to the cabin and captured Leaper.

During this time, Goss arrived in Denver where he met Whip King, Waggle.

Before the Pilgrim reached the city, his sister, Annie, arrived from the East unexpectedly. When the Pilgrim arrived, he was sought out by Goss, who made all arrangements for sister and brother to get out of town before the Pilgrim should be discovered by the deputies. Whip King offered his ranch, several miles from the city, and the Pilgrim and his sister were guided there.

Goss, following them, strayed from the main trail, and came to De Louge's cabin where four men were playing cards. He was permitted to join in the game, and soon had most of the winnings. Enraged by defeat, Burt Damon cheated and was accused by his pal, "Snap." Damon stabbed Snap and started for Goss, who shot him through the head. Goss collected the money he had won, and keeping himself covered from De Louge and the other men, went out into the night.

GOSS finally found his way to Cañon City, from where he hastened to Pueblo, stopping for a brief call at the ranch where the Pilgrim and Annie were living.

Shortly after his departure, DeLouge and his two understudies, Snap and Seth, arrived, searching for him. Annie sensed trouble and hotly said that she did not know Goss. Later on the same day Vince Moore called, and, upon the first insult, was thoroughly beaten up by the Pilgrim. This proved to be the turning point in the Pilgrim's weakness of character.

"I fear no man now," he declared.

Shortly after Goss arrived in Pueblo he met Lomsom, who had deserted the Utes for the season He tried to interest Goss in some placers that he claimed to be known only to himself. During one of their conversations they met a man who was known as "Black Bill." Cards followed, Black Bill cheated, and a fight ensued, during which Bill escaped into the darkness.

Directly on top of this incident, DeLouge appeared and told Goss that a duel would be the only way to settle the trouble between them. While they were making plans for the fight, they learned that Vince Moore and a gang of his followers were planning to attack Ellis at his ranch to get revenge for the beating he gave Vince.

Goss and DeLouge immediately forgot their own quarrel and set out to cut off the plotters before they came to the ranch.

Out on the plains, not far from the Ellis place, the two factions met, and open battle ensued in which several of Ellis' enemies were slain, a few escaping.

DeLouge then declared that the duel with Goss was off, maintaining that Goss was "licked" already when he let one of his men get away unscratched.

Goss then turned his thoughts from the gambling table to prospecting.

BROTHER and sister stared in silence at him as if scarcely sensing his words. The girl was almost incredulous as she slowly said:

"And I needn't ever be afraid again that every horseman I see has come to take Frank away? And I needn't keep awake at night, listening to learn if a rider is turning in here, or going up or down the valley?"

Frank found his tongue and excitedly cried—

"Think of it, Annie! I can hold up my head among folks, tell who I am and where I came from. I can sing a song and not care if they know I'm the Singing Pilgrim. I'm just ordinary folks again. Hooray!"

And in his exuberance he threw back his head and broke off to sing "Bright Fields Beyond the Swelling Flood."

With her blue eyes blurred with tears the girl turned her flushed face away and in a scarcely audible voice asked—

"When did you go to Cañon City?"

"Night before last. Early in the morning when I passed here," replied Goss.

"And I heard your horse and was awake, fearing the old fear. And you went by without stopping."

"You're a shrewd one, Annie!" cried her brother. "I'd never had brains to think of that after hearing Nate's good news. Of course he went by without stopping. What made you do that, Nate?"

"Trip was unexpected. Had to make it in the night. Saved my call for this morning. And if I'd stopped I might have missed Whip King and wouldn't have learned you are no longer wanted," glibly answered Goss.

"Say, Nate," babbled Ellis, "I feel like a prisoner for life who's suddenly been turned loose. Never knew till now what a hold it had on me."

And nothing now would suffice to express his feelings except a stanza from "Sweet Betsy from Pike."

The girl faced Goss and tried to explain:

"When I worked I tried to keep my face to the window so I could look out. If I had to turn my back I was nervous till I could face around. In the day and at night——"

She hurried into her room and closed the door.

Ellis ceased his singing and gazed after her for a moment, then said:

"Hit the old girl pretty hard. Queer how women cry when they're happy. But happiness can't hurt any one."

And he returned to his song and sang it with much feeling. Finally he broke off to say:

"Nate, you brought me good luck from the first talk we had up the side of the gulch. I'm much obliged. You know that."

Shyness overcame him. Then he was running on:

"It'll seem good to be called the Singing Pilgrim again. When they called me that I used to think I was almost somebody. And yet, who could have killed Skillings?"

"Hush. She'll hear. When do you two want to start? First travel in the spring, I suppose. I'll buy out your interest and put some one on here to run the ranch. You have a paying proposition started. Your share is worth good money. I'd say, as a guess——"

The door of the girl's room banged open and she was before them, her eyes blazing.

"We have not a paying proposition started," she fiercely told them. "You started it. It's your money. We've been living out of your money. Our share is nothing yet."

"But we three are partners," insisted her brother, with a side glance at the account book.

"Partners after we've done something to make up for the money he's put in."

With a suddenness that astounded the gambler she was out of her dramatic mood and was smiling broadly, and was marveling:

"To think of it! It's like being hit on the head with a club to be cured of a sickness! Everything was wrong with Frank, with me, with the world. We went into hiding down here. You put in money. Mr. Frazer helped with advice. And out of what we believed to be the worst sort of misfortune we've really started to do something for ourselves. If we stay here and develop this place we will have an interest in a paying proposition. But one thing is sure, Mr. Goss, you'd never develop it. I don't believe you'd ever bother even to find some one to take up the work. So, Frank, it's for you and me to get Mr. Goss' money back with interest. After that's done we'll think about going back east."

"I'll be darned!" muttered her brother in great surprize. "How many times you've said you wished we both were east the Mississippi? I was sure you'd be the first to toss up a hat and hurrah. Why, Annie, I'm not keen to pull out. Nothing in the east for me. Of course we'll stay and not leave old Nate to pocket a loss."

"Just forget me and my loss," Goss requested. "It's seldom I take a loss. I sha'n't on this place. Land values are sure to go up here. I'm sure to take a good profit if never a crop is put in."

"Nonsense," scoffed the girl. "You forget you don't own the land. You're just talking. Frank and I are agreed to remain and carry out our plans."

Goss' face became very mobile, and it was a decided grin and not a smile that showed his teeth. He eagerly said:

"If you two feel that way I'm confident you'll make this a handsome paying piece of property. I'll guarantee I can arrange with Ancient Days to sell on terms that can easily be met. Now I'll be jogging on."

"Why! you've just come," cried the girl.

"I'm always just coming or going," was his whimsical reply. "But I'll try to be more neighborly. I want to keep an eye on those accounts. I'm just remembering to mention the fact I'm still thinking strong of prospecting a bit next season. Down in the hills south of the river, perhaps. That country hasn't been overrun yet, and from talk at Pueblo I've got the notion there's gold to be found down there."

"Neither gold nor silver has been reported down there," gravely warned Ellis.

"None reported in California Gulch until a discovery was made. There are lots of fat lodes in the territory that a white man hasn't struck a pick into yet. I don't doubt but that Lomsom, the White Chief of the Utes, could lead us to a dozen that no other white man ever saw."

"The wicked truth, Nate, as sure's you're born!" readily surrendered Ellis. "And if you go, I'm going. Just one more try, Annie, and I'm sure I'll strike it rich."

"That's to be talked about," she evaded. "Just now I'm interested in inducing Mr. Goss to stay to dinner."

But Goss insisted he must be traveling, and invented several fictitious reasons for an immediate departure. As he talked she studied him throughfully, and for once his poker face failed as a mask. After he had finished she quietly told him:

"I don't know why you are in such a hurry. You haven't said. But go. Some time you'll feel like staying."

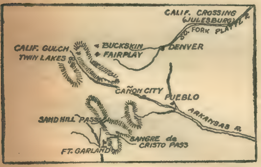
He mumbled further excuses and went outdoors and mounted. Ellis eagerly called his attention to the few improvements, and then remembered to inquire—

"How's luck these days?"

"So, so, if you mean cards. If you mean other things, luck is bully. I have an idea that I'm slowly, very slowly, working out of the card business. Perfectly honorable, you know. Perfectly moral, but perhaps too uncertain unless a man can always remain young."

SOME farmers in the valley sowed wheat in February, and March brought planting weather for all. Frazer and his wife and three neighbors gave two days' work at the Ellis place. Mrs. Frazer and Annie Ellis not only cooked the meals but found much time to care for the many hens and to help with the planting. This kindly assistance made it possible for Ellis and his sister to complete sowing all that Frazer deemed advisable for this, their first year.

With the sun climbing higher each day and the Arkansas steadily rising as the snow-water poured down from the mountains there came the surge of spring optimism to brother and sister. The winter had been like an Indian summer, a pleasant relief from the stern cold of white months east of the Mississippi.



Yet the voices of running waters, the budding and leafing of the trees and the genial warmth of the sun supplied to each of the young pioneers the belief that something extremely good was always about to happen. This confidence mounted with the sun. Old fears were forgotten. The tragedy enacted close by the ranch house was something very far off.

Then one day, when the planting was finished, Goss and an Indian rode up to the house. Annie eyed the swarthy complexion and prominent cheek bones askance. Her brother gave a yelp of joy and ran to shake the Indian's hand and exclaim:

"The Rabbit! Annie, come here and meet my friend, the man who saved my life. How did you happen to meet him, Nate?"

The girl shook hands and wondered if the man understood English.

"It is good to see you, Miss Ellis. I like your brother," the Rabbit told her.

She faltered a welcome, taken aback by his excellent English. Goss remarked:

"Seems I am nobody's friend. I might as well be out in a snowstorm without any blankets."

"We are glad to see you, partner," she demurely greeted. "After Frank has shown you about the place you both come in and have something to eat."

She left them and Frank proudly exhibited the extent of their planting. He tried to learn the cause for the gambler's coming, but Goss would say nothing until they were indoors. Then he explained:

"The Rabbit brought me a message from Lomsom, White Chief of the Utes. I told you about Lomsom trying to break away from the Indians last fall and being recognized by Pete Dotson in Pueblo and compelled to run for it. He went back to the mountains and his Indians. Now he's broken away and is ready to try his luck at gold mining. He wants me to meet him somewheres down on the Huerfano. The Rabbit knows just where he's waiting and will guide me. I'm also asked to bring Ancient Days and Joe Hasty along.

"You remember Hasty as Big Bones, only he isn't crazy anymore and doesn't remember anything of California Gulch, Frank. And you're included in the invitation. Lomsom left it to me to pick the men. He insisted there should be no more than six of us all told. Now the question is, will it be wise for you to make the trip after getting such a fine start at farming? If I'd known how much land you'd broken up and planted I don't know as I'd have asked you."

"Land is good," said the Rabbit. "No hunting for gold where corn and vegetables are planted. It's there, where the seed comes through the ground."

"I'd never forgiven you if you'd passed me by," declared Ellis. "I've said right along I'd have one more try at prospecting. That Lomsom ought to know where gold can be found. By your tell he's had the run of the mountains for going onto three years, and knows places where white men don't dare go. If the Rabbit thinks well enough of it to quit hunting game to hunt gold why shouldn't I try it while crops are growing?"

"I'm to have two dollars a day as guide and a sixth interest in whatever is found," explained the Rabbit. "I wish to earn some money for my folks."

Annie was recalling her brother's grotesque story of a man voluntarily returning home to be executed, and she fell to trembling because of the inexorable tragedy of it all. Goss perceived her emotion and said:

"If your sister is willing you can go. If not, you can't."

"The crops are in. It's simply a matter of waiting and hoeing a bit," insisted Ellis.

The girl asked Goss:

"Is there any danger in this trip? I mean danger aside from the natural risks of mining."

"There shouldn't be any," he readily replied. "We're going where no gold discoveries have been made. It's far enough among the hills to be away from the Plains Indians. The man Lomsom is a white man, yet chief of a band of Utes. We should go and do our work without meeting any one. Really, I can't see as it's any more risky than shooting prairie chickens. But no one can foresee the unexpected."

"Then Frank shall go," she decided. "I will stay with the Frazers. Mrs. Frazer is a dear. When will you start? How long will you be gone?"

"We must start a week from today. As my idea is to sell and not attempt to work any lode we find I'd say we should be back inside of six weeks. If we're lucky we'll be back much sooner. We'll start from Pueblo to escape being followed by those who think every man with a pack-mule has struck it rich. The Rabbit goes from here to Cañon City to pick up Ancient Days and Joe Hasty. On his way to Pueblo he'll stop here and get Frank. You'll need your gun and a horse, Frank. I'm riding back to Pueblo today to arrange for the outfit. We'll take two pack-mules and the horses we ride. If you'll be good enough to feed us, the Rabbit will be on his way. He's in a hurry. If Ancient and Hasty have left Cañon he'll have to follow them."

"You can eat very soon. But just why are you anxious to have those two men?" inquired the girl as she began preparing a meal.

Goss flushed and confessed:

"Joe Hasty is said to be lucky. I'm superstitious, I fear. And Hasty won't go on any trip unless Ancient is along. While waiting for the Rabbit to return you two will have time to make arrangements with the Frazers."

"But you're not riding to Pueblo today?" objected Ellis.

"That was just talk," added his sister. "He can stay here a few days, or long enough to get acquainted with his third of the place."

Goss compromised by agreeing, "I'll wait over until morning. My horse has earned that much rest."

The Rabbit ate and without a word ran out to his horse and rode away. "He knows the white man's ways. He reads our books and talks our lingo as well as we do, and yet he is all Indian," mused Goss, looking after the receding figure. "I really believe he's rather fond of me. I know he likes Frank, but off he goes without a word. He's pleased you had him to dinner, but off he goes without so much as a thank you."

"He may be part white at times, but he was red when he talked to the Utes," reminded Ellis with a little shiver.

That afternoon the three of them rode over to the Frazer place and quickly arranged for the girl to stay there. Early next morning Goss started for Pueblo, the high spring sun bringing new hopes to him as it had to Ellis, to all Colorado. Those who had fared poorly in 1862 were now confident of largesses from 1863. Veteran prospectors with three years of failure back of them renewed their faith and outfitted for another endeavor, firmly believing that this season their luck would turn.

In crossing Colorado this season the climbing sun saw General Hooker's four corps at the farmhouse known in history as Chancellorsville; saw Stonewall Jackson execute one of his masterly turning movements. Grant was completing his plans for the campaign against Vicksburg, and events were shaping to add the town of Gettysburg to imperishable history. The return of spring was creating the belief that the national dissension was nearing the end.

ON THE Arkansas River ranch young Ellis was lifted up, and he relieved his exuberance with much singing. His sister, not so light of heart, believed he was thinking about the prospecting trip, but it was the spring air that made him sing and hope. One morning while he was indulging in the pathos of "My Old Kentucky Home," his mellow voice climbing like the lark, his sister came to the door and called out:

"Three horsemen from the west. One of them looks like the Indian you call the Rabbit."

He ran toward the road, waving his arms. The Indian lifted his open hand and came on at a furious gallop. Ancient Days gave a wild whoop and tore madly by the Indian. He was wearing new buckskins, heavily fringed, and thoroughly looked the mountain man freshly outfitted. Joe Hasty, riding sedately as one who approaches strangers, kept back of the Rabbit.

Ancient had a practical purpose in racing ahead of his two companions: for his first words to Ellis were:

"Don't call him Big Bones. He's his old self again. Ain't had a spell since you see him last. Don't remember nothing about you, or about being in the gulch. You're meeting him for the first time, Pilgrim. Howdy do, ma'am. You must be the Pilgrim's sister. Mighty purty young woman."

He dismounted and shook hands with them and eyed the girl in open admiration, and declared:

"Purty's a picter. Lawd! but I'd move beyond the river if I'd ever known they grew 'em so purty back there."

The girl showed almost all her teeth as she laughingly made him welcome, then turned to meet the Indian and Hasty. The latter gave no sign of having seen Ellis before. Like the red man he was taciturn. Ancient Days did the talking for the three of them. The girl left them for her brother to entertain while she hurried food to the table. The men wandered over the ranch and Ancient marveled at the plowed ground and declared it beat all, and that he never dreamed stuff would grow there. At the end of an hour's inspection he was talking as volubly as ever. Ellis surmised the old fellow had fortified himself for the trip with several drinks in Cañon City for he talked almost unceasingly. Hasty told him—

"You oughter hog-out that voice of yours before long."

"A purty gal always starts me talking," loudly declared Ancient. "I'm hungry to look at her again, she's that pink-and-white."

He led the way to the house and immediately on entering he told the girl—

"Takes Nate Goss to know a good bargain when he sees it?"

He amused her and she liked him on sight, but his assertion caused her brows to rise questioningly. Joe Hasty muttered something at Ancient's ear, and the latter quickly amended, "Meaning this ranch, Ma'am."

"Meaning this ranch," she prompted softly but with her gaze quickening.

"Just so. Here I've been pitying him for buying it, and now I'll be darned if he didn't know what he was up to, and if he didn't make a mighty good bargain."

"—— fool!" softly hissed Hasty.

The girl's gaze was a bit wild as she looked from him to her astounded brother. Hasty growled, "Worked yourself half a mile deep in cap." Ancient realized he had talked too freely and was alarmed and confused. He would have turned the conversation had not the girl pinned him down by demanding, "Just when did Mr. Goss buy this place of you?"

"In a way of speaking, ma'am, I wouldn't go so far as to say that he ever bought it," he desperately replied.

Ellis caught him by the shoulder and whirled him about and warned:

"None of that, Ancient. We know all about it. My sister asked just when did he buy it?"

"Oh, ——! Joe Hasty read the signs. He sent up a signal smoke and I wouldn't look at it. Last fall, a night when he was buying a mule load of grub for you."

"Of course," softly said the girl. "Bought it last fall."

Ancient hopefully added:

"Joe'n me drunk up half the money without scarcely stirring from our tracks. Every round of drinks must a cost me an acre of improved land. Leastwise, it remembers like that."

"He promised Goss he'd never yip a word," gloomily informed Hasty. "Now he's busted his promise because he would h'ist in more drinks'n he needed."

Ancient was now much worried, and he lamented:

"It was the whisky. Hall give me a different kind of a bottle. Goss'll cut my throat when he hears I've let the cat out the bag. Pilgrim, you ask your purty sister to keep her trap closed about my talking."

Ellis did not appear to hear him, but dazedly exclaimed:

"Good land! Nate has owned this land all the time besides putting money into it. And we thought it was even-Stephen, three equal partners."

"Let's not talk about it any more," broke in his sister. "What we have to eat is on the table. Draw up and help yourselves. Frank and I have eaten." And as she bustled about to get them seated she picked up the account book and tossed it into the box that served as a cupboard.

Ancient continued to be uneasy. He ate in silence and watched through the window, fearing lest the gambler put in an appearance. Finally he said:

"Hope you're ready for the road, Pilgrim. We're oughter be riding at once."

Ellis looked at his sister, wondering if the disclosure was to change their plans. She read his question and told him:

"Mr. Goss wishes to start as soon as possible. All the more need to find some gold. I'll go along with you as far as the turn to Frazer's. Mr. Frazer's man will take the cows over to his place and some one will be over every day to look after the hens."

With the meal finished and the dishes washed and the rooms swept, Ellis went to harness the horses to the light carriage. The Indian and Hasty followed him, but Ancient Days timidly lingered and told the girl:

"I hope, ma'am, you won't ever let on about Goss buying this place. I cut open a big dog when I mentioned it. Meaning, ma'am, I put my foot in and sprung the trap. Goss will be most powerful angry at me. So if you can manage to do what I couldn't, keep your trap closed."

"I'll make no promises I can't keep," she sternly interrupted.

Dejected and mournful of mien he started for the door and was befuddled to find her hand clutching his fringed sleeve and to hear her whispering—

"Oh, I'm so glad you told me!"

"Pink'n white. Purty's a picter," he mumbled as he hurried to his horse.

For most of the way to Frazer's the party kept together. When it came time for the girl to turn off the road the men waited while Ellis escorted her to the ranch. In a short time he galloped back and the journey was resumed. Ancient immediately pleaded with Ellis to say nothing to Goss about the broken promise.

Ellis quieted him by saying:

"I'm under promise already to my sister. She'll be the one to do the talking."

The Rabbit rode some distance ahead and ended the thirty odd miles of travel half an hour ahead of the others. The three whites found him helping Goss to complete assembling the outfit. The gambler greeted them and bruskly announced:

"We start early in the morning. Everything is ready except packing the loads. There's nothing more to be done except to see that Ancient has no more liquor. If he takes another drink we'll have the whole town trailing after us."

"He told every one in Cañon about Bowen's mine and there was so many chasing Bowen that no one could keep him in sight. We plumb lost him," grumbled Hasty.

"That's harsh, Joey. Mighty harsh to say about an old pard," mildly rebuked Ancient. "But I ain't honing for more liquor. It's taught me an awful lesson." Then catching Ellis' accusing gaze he added—

"Feel now like I'd never tech the stuff again."

He was imprisoned in one of Uncle Tommy Suttles' rooms until an hour before sunrise. When he joined his friends at breakfast he learned the mules were packed and that the start would be made at once.

The initial step, the fording of the Arkansas, was disagreeable, as the stream was a hundred feet wide and held nearly three feet of icy, swift flowing water. The town was asleep when they pulled out, and still slept when they made the southern bank and entered the broken mesa country, that stretched away west and south to the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo range.

UP CAME the sun to warm and cheer them and dazzle their eyes whenever they glanced at the snowy peaks. They were traveling over the bed of an ancient sea that once stretched from what the last tick of Time's clock permits mortals to name Iowa to the Wasatch Mountains.

And this, eons before the mighty Rocky Mountains came into existence. The immensity of the thought appealed to none of the travelers, although marine shells were common enough in the exposed rocks along the lower reaches of the river. When a short distance from the river bank Ellis saw what he took to be an embedded shell and was pointing it out to his companions when Ancient tugged his arm and glanced at Joe Hasty and shook his head. He motioned for Ellis to allow the others to draw a bit ahead and then whispered:

"Don't say nor do nothing that'll make Joey think about what used to be here back as early as Bible times. A shell might set his mind to thinking about them big animals."

The Rabbit as guide had nothing to do in this early stage of the journey. For ten miles their way led to the St. Charles and the path was well established by Pete Dotson and a few other settlers between that stream and Pueblo. They passed through a flat, treeless, waterless stretch of cacti and sage brush and halted briefly on the bank. The clear, rapid stream, two feet deep and forty feet wide, was locked in its course by hundred-foot bluffs.

The bottom varied from five hundred to fifteen hundred feet in width. The river was soon forded and a course taken that skirted the eastern foothills of the Greenhorn range. If not for the visions of wealth somewhere ahead, they would have found the country depressing, as there was no timber except the thin growths of cedar in the flat mesas. The Rabbit laconically informed that the country was good for sheltering and raising stock because it was broken into deep, narrow valleys and ravines.

At the end of eighteen miles of leisurely travel they halted in the half-mile wide valley of Muddy Creek. Ancient Days was eager to start prospecting at once, but Joe Hasty eyed the black slate and dark blue limestone out-croppings in disgust, while the Rabbit reminded they were to waste no time in finding Lomsom.

Fuel was supplied by the creek growth of box elders and the dead limbs of the scattered elms and cottonwoods. They made coffee and ate their dinner, and were told by the Indian they must push on for another nine miles to the Little Greenhorn before camping for the night.

"Then we will be almost half-way to the place where we are to meet Lomsom," he added.

"That depends on just what point on the Huerfano he's waiting for us," observed Goss.

"Not on the Huerfano," corrected the Indian. "The White Chief talked as a timber hunter walks, very carefully. I promised to lead you men to him, and not to tell you just where you are going. The white Chief trusts a red man, but not white men."

"I allow we can be trusted with a secret just as much as an Injun can be," sternly remarked Ancient.

"If Lomsom knew you as well as I do he would know how far you can be trusted," gravely replied Ellis. Ancient Days felt his face burning under his whiskers and turned away to busy himself with saddling his horse.

The remainder of the day's march was made slowly through a broken country, and the night was passed in a creek bottom where there was thin grass and poor water.

The sun was still abed when the prospectors finished the morning meal and started for Apache Creek, some seven miles. They paused at the Apache only long enough to water their horses, then held due south with the foothills of the Greenhorn on their right. Sparing their animals, they made another dozen miles and rounded the southeastern spur of the range and halted on the Huerfano for two hours. The Rabbit told them that two miles south of their camp the river emerged from the mountains, flowing southwest through a cañon of brown sandstone. It was up this cañon that Goss had expected to travel to find Lomsom. He said as much to the Indian, but the Rabbit shook his head, and explained:

"You will know when we find him. You will see him, and hear him speak."

Goss made a wry face at this bit of irony. Ancient Days warmly approved:

"That's the way to stop prying questions, Rabbit. You gave your word and it's for you to keep it. Enough for me to know we're most there."

The red hunter told them:

"Lomsom won't wait for us at the heads of the Huerfano for a very good reason. His Utes will be looking for him. Up there would be too near the Sand Hill Pass, one of the favorite passes of the Utes. The White Chief doesn't dare be found by his Utes hunting for gold in the high valley of the Huerfano. They are young men who wouldn't listen to Ouray. It doesn't take much to turn them against any leader."

While Ellis and Hasty were cooking supper, Ancient Days got the Indian aside and anxiously asked—

"Do you know if there's any bones of queer looking animals down this way?"

The Rabbit shook his head. Ancient was much relieved, and explained:

"It's along of Joe Hasty I ask. If he see any of them big bones he's likely to go crazy again. If he does, then only the good —— knows how we could handle him. Prob'ly have to tie him up."

"I haven't seen any big bones down this way. But it's a new country to me. The White Chief drew a map in the dirt with a stick. I looked at it and he rubbed it out. I carry it in my head. He said nothing of bones. We should be finding him tomorrow. But it's bad medicine to bring a man like Hasty along."

"No, siree! He's the biggest medicine that ever was when it comes to stumbling onto ounce diggings. Seems to smell gold."

Leaving the river and traveling southwest, they rode for two miles and crossed the shallow fork of a small tributary, and entered between two spurs like gaping jaws, and commenced the fourteen-mile ascent, which, if persisted in, would carry them over the top of the Sangre de Cristo Pass. They were on the most direct route for a wagon road between Pueblo and Fort Garland and the upper Rio Grande.

With the Indian setting the pace they moved very slowly for four miles. Then their guide halted and gave the word to unpack the mules and make camp for the day. The ascent had been steady but nowhere near as steep as the remainder of the grade to the summit. They had followed along the west bank of the brawling stream, and although snugly inside the huge jaws, there was sufficient grass for their animals.

"Then we don't pass over the summit?" queried Goss.

"We will wait here a day," replied the Rabbit.

Ancient Days lost no time in procuring a pickax and spade. He called on Hasty to join him, boasting:

"We two can locate a mine before Lomsom shows up. Git your eagle eyes to working, Joey."

But Hasty shook his head and remained cross-legged before the flat rocks arranged for the fire and continued breaking twigs for kindling. Ancient penetrated the broken surface of the western slope. Ellis felt the impulse, only his choice was the bank of the little stream. With shovel and pan he worked along the edge of the water and became excited on washing out several colors. Goss produced a pack of cards and became absorbed in a game of solitaire. As he was shuffling the cards for another endeavor Hasty reached across his knee and cut the pack.

"Black," he muttered. "Death."

Goss stared at him in amazement, then chuckled and bantered:

"Surely, Joe, you don't nurse any foolish superstitions. Who's going to die?"

"I cut the cards."

"Well, we'll all cut black some day. Let's see what I cut."

Hasty glanced at the diamond and quietly said—

"You cut gold. You'll find gold."

"It's mighty more likely than that you'll find death. Play eucher?"

"Thanks. Don't feel like it. Wish that White Injun would show up and we could make our strike and hustle back to the Arkansas."

"You're in a state of mind, Joe. Shake it off. We'll have the Pilgrim give us a song."

Hasty looked at Ellis, busily washing dirt, and mused:

"Seems if I use to hear him singing years and years ago. Course I didn't. He's too young."

Ancient Days came back, highly disgusted.

"I'd just quick think of finding pay dirt in a cottonwood tree as in this darned country," he complained.

Ellis came up and threw down his pan and shovel, and announced—

"Found color every time."

"That's nothing," said Goss. "George Earle, on a wager, washed color from the Kansas River near Lawrence in '57. Got about the same as you have here. You can find color almost anywhere in Colorado."

Ellis glanced at his companions in turn and said:

"A grumpy looking lot. We're here

alive. A man's coming to show us where to shovel it out. Start the fire and let's eat and see if this outfit can't show a little gumption."

SUPPLIES were overhauled and Hasty volunteered to act as cook. The Rabbit promised to start hunting on the morrow and supply them with fresh meat. The surrounding heights brought early dusk. It was quite dark when they finished eating and the Rabbit was the only one to discover a figure approaching from down the summit path.

"White man. Tell by the way he walks," said Ancient Days.

"It's Lomsom," said the Rabbit.

In another minute Lomsom, washed of his paint and clad in new buckskins, stepped into the firelight and said:

"Hope you saved some grub for me. Been watching you from up above."

As he squatted in the circle between Ellis and the gambler the latter remarked:

"Your way of saying good evening, I take it. We welcome you. How much farther to these hidden diggings of yours? And why didn't you come to us when you first saw us?"

"That makes two talks. I thought I saw a smoke up in the north and stayed up the slope to make sure. Must have been mist or something. My placer begins within a few rods of here. I don't know anything about mining but the surface looked good. Six miles below the summit on the other side is five-dollar diggings.* The gold comes in flakes, or scales. But this is richer, I'm thinking."

"I was hoping you'd struck a big bonanza, where one could git it out in big nuggets," said Ancient Days.

"I would'nt need any help if it was like that," the White Chief reminded.

Between mouthfuls of food he continued:

"But I know where you can find nuggets, only you'd have to leave your hair in a Ute smoke. I'm chief of a band of Utes, and I never dared to work it. But you fellers can go there after you've worked this place."

"This place will do fine, I know," quickly assured Ellis, his thoughts darting back to his captivity and the time he stood on the edge of death. "And I won't go near any Utes for eighteen billion dollars."

"What are the Plains Indians doing?" queried the Rabbit. "S. G. Colley, the Indian agent for the Upper Arkansas, says the Cheyennes and Arapahoes are getting ready to fight the Utes."

"The mountains are filled with signal smokes," moodily replied Lomsom. "The Utes can lick'em if they come into the hills. It'll be bad for the white folks, for when the Plains Injuns fight the Utes they'll take a whack at anything they happen to meet. Hide and tallow hunters have killed buffalo by the thousands. Bands of young Kiowas are demanding presents from small trains. My Utes are blamed for horses stolen by the 'Rapahoes and Cheyennes, who come to the mountains to steal and don't want to go back empty-handed. Your Injun Agent Colley perhaps don't know that the Sioux already this season have offered a war-pipe to a camp of 'Rapahoes on Cache la Poudre. 'Rapahoes wouldn't smoke, but it shows how the Sioux feel.

Not only the hungry Injuns along the Arkansas and Platte are making war medicine, but those at the heads of the Republican and the Smoky Hill are gitting fussed up. They still have buffalo, but white hunters were busy in their country last season, killing buffalo for the hides and tallow. There'll be a full hundred white hunters on the Saline alone this season.*"

"Let the Utes and Arapahoes fight. It'll keep them from finding us," said Goss.

"If we don't happen to wander between two war parties, yes," agreed Lomsom.

The morning brought impatience to the seven men. Each was visioning what he would do with his share of the gold. Lomsom lost the stolid bearing he had acquired among the Utes. His hands trembled as he bolted his breakfast, and he talked incoherently about his plans for making eastern cities "r'ar up and take notice."

Ancient Days smiled much and softly hummed an old tune and visualized the gold as so many gallons of "Monongahela" and "Kansas Double Rectified."

"And of course there'll always be a few snorts of Taos, just for old times," he told Hasty.

Hasty alone seemed too preoccupied for speech.

The seven men proceeded to the diggings on the run, Lomsom leading the way.

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*Later called the "Grayback Gold Mine," employing fifteen men.

*There were a hundred such hunters on the Saline in 1864. See Grinnell's "The Fighting Cheyennes."

When Lomsom halted and pointed to where he had taken scale gold from the rocks Ancient Days saw the saloons of all his day-dreaming vanish. He tugged his whiskers and stared blankly. Goss took his cue from him and was much depressed. Ellis had had enough experience to realize the difficulty of carrying the dirt to the stream, and as the stream was down the slope, this task would be necessary.

Joe Hasty examined the ground carefully and then without a word walked back to the camp. Goss' hopes went up a bit, for he relied on Hasty's judgment more than he did on Ancient's. But Hasty, after securing a pan and a shovel, walked down the bank of the little stream and disappeared in a clump of willows.

Ancient sadly announced:

"Joey's plumb ag'in it. Won't have nothing to do with it."

"But gold's here," angrily insisted Lomsom. "I've dug flakes out of cracks in the rock with my hunting knife, I tell you. You fellers oughter find a lot where I've found a little."

"We'll give it a try," assured Ancient. Goss was willing to aid him. The Rabbit caught Ellis' eye and shook his head and forthwith started off, trailing his rifle, to find some game for the kettle. Ellis went back to the camp and procured his pan and went to find Hasty.

At midday they returned to the camp. Goss exhibited the result of his morning's work, enough tiny scales, Hasty estimated, to amount to two dollars. The gambler stared at his scratched and bruised fingers and growled his disgust.

"Not enough to open one jack-pot with," he bitterly said.

"It comes to five-doller diggings," defended Lomsom.

"Maybe, but I won't have any hands after two days," replied the gambler.

Ancient Days remarked:

"I had in mind, Lomsom, something more chunky. Rich dirt on water, or pockets of nuggets. If I'd stick here all the time and work all the time I'd git almost enough to pay for my whisky, which I can't buy without going to Cañon or Pueblo. No use to peg out claims till we strike it richer. We ain't even found rock that would pay to put through a stamper. What did you find, Joey?"

"The young man'n me have done a little better."

And he carefully opened his handkerchief and displayed several dollars' worth of gold and some samples of galena. The latter was black and uninviting in the estimation of Goss and Lomsom.

Lomsom insisted:

"I tell you there's a mother vein of pure gold near here. We can find it. But it ain't down in the river gravel. It's up there in them rocks."

Ancient Days, remembering Bowen's find, leaned forward and gently stirred the black lumps with a finger and softly cried—

"Silver!"

"Fifteen hundred ounces of silver to the ton," quietly said Hasty. "Only trouble is it'll cost twenty-five thousand dollars to put up a furnace-building and furnaces."

"Then it ain't worth a ——!" angrily declared Lomsom. "First sign of a train fetching all those contraptions would bring a cloud of Utes through Sand Hill Pass and down the valley of the Huerfano. What I git I must git quick and run for it. And I'll be lucky to keep an arrer-shot ahead of war whoops."

"Best way to make money mining is to locate your mine and then sell it to Easterners," mused Goss. "Let's take another look at that black stuff."

They walked down the creek to where Hasty and Ellis had cleared loose earth from a vein that was very wide. The gambler's enthusiasm was intense until Hasty explained that the ore itself was to be found only in the small seams streaking the vein.

Lomsom insisted:

"I want gold. Silver's no good. Mexicans hang it on their clothes."

"Go find your gold," mumbled Hasty. "Trail's broke out. Ellis'n me will dig down into this vein and see how things look. We claim discovery rights. You fellers can claim on either side of us. Discovery rights hold good whether worked or not."

Ancient hesitated and fingered his beard, and then decided:

"It's the yaller stuff we're after. I'll hunt for it a while longer."

Never was a treasure expedition more quickly disintegrated than this one. Goss and Ancient continued prospecting for gold although the former's high hopes were dashed to pieces. He worked doggedly, determined to give even a lost cause a thorough trial.

Ancient was blithe and gloomy by turns. After the first day Lomsom developed great uneasiness and gave but little heed to prospecting. He was continually watching the heavens to the north, in the direction of Sand Hill Pass, for a smoke. At the close of the second day he told Goss that the Utes were hunting for him and might kill him for running away. Not only did he cease laboring with pick and shovel; he left the party and climbed high above the camp to watch for smoke signals. He would leave the camp after breakfast and did not return until dusk.

Goss knew nothing about mining except as he had observed men at work in the gold camps. He toiled doggedly under Ancient's directions, but soon became irritated by his companion's shiftless behavior.

"You sort of paw this ground over while I'm taking a peek up beyond," Ancient would direct. After this had gone on for a time Goss rebelled and demanded:

"See here, Ancient. I'm no slave. If this stuff is worth pawing over you stay and help. You're forever going somewhere to take a peek at something. You've led me to half a dozen places and left me while you wander off to a new place. If you found gold in bushel lots you'd quit to find it in barrel lots."

"Man would be a fool who wouldn't quit a bushel of gold for a bar'el," agreed Ancient.

The Rabbit was no miner and spent his time hunting. He kept the camp supplied with game and was absent most of the daylight hours. Like a shadow he came in at night and made but little talk. He never asked how the prospecting was progressing. Doubtless he read the situation with one quick glance at the downcast faces.

ELLIS and Hasty stuck to their original task and laboriously picked and shoveled until they had followed the cropping down for some fifteen feet, or far enough to uncover a vein of pure ore that measured twelve inches in width and gave every promise of becoming wider. When this result was obtained Hasty became talkative long enough to announce the vein comprised argentiferous galena, brittle silver glance, and cupreous sulphuret of silver. He concluded by advising:

"Time you all were staking your claims. Our shaft proves the lode is widening rapidly and the pay streak is growing bigger every foot we go down."

"Silver's all right," agreed Ancient. "I'll peg a claim tomorrer. But I've had my mouth made up for gold. Goss'n me will come to supper one of these days with samples of ore that'll make your silver look like so much common lead."

"That day must come mighty quick, Ancient," warned the gambler.

Then to Lomsom—

"Is this the best you can show us?"

"The best unless we lose our hair," glumly replied Lomsom, who was keenly disappointed that his companions had not already unearthed more gold than the pack-mules could carry.

"Tomorrer I'll take you to a place higher up'n we've been, Nathan," lazily promised Ancient. "It looks likely, what I've seen of it."

"I'm through chasing you around, Ancient. I'll help Frank and Joe work the silver lode and take a claim on it," replied Goss.

"That shows a poor spirit," cried Ancient. "Well, I ain't as young as you, but I'll keep on hunting with the light that the good Lawd has given me."

Claims were taken on the lode next morning by all except Lomsom, who refused. The gambler kept his word to Ancient by assisting Hasty and Ellis. Ancient wandered alone up the heights. At sunset the Rabbit came back but brought no game. He startled his companions by announcing:

"Two smokes. One to the north and one to the west of us."

Lomsom, who had returned earlier, drew a deep breath and faintly exclaimed:

"My Utes hunting for me in the north. T'other must be some of the Plains Injuns trying to sneak into the hills to make another kill like they did when they bagged Benito, head chief of the Utes. Mebbe trying to bag Ouray."

"I believe that," agreed the Rabbit. "We must make no more smoke for a few days, but do our cooking at night with the light hidden."

When the Rabbit moved nearer the small fire to receive his ration of meat Lomsom inquired—

"What's the thing hanging to the back of your belt?"

"A queer bone. Part of the head of an

animal that's never found alive in these days. Something told me it would be strong medicine.

"And he unfastened the fragment of a dinosaur's skull and wrapped it in a blanket.

"No good," said Lomsom. "Lots of 'em near Oil Creek. Bones of the whole critter, more'n twenty foot long. Big one was found near Denver. Some say it was them that made the three-toed tracks I'd seen in the sandstone. Must a been reg'lar old hellions."

Hasty lurched forward and stared steadily at the blanket hiding the fossilized piece of bone. Ancient Days groaned and muttered—

"Now you've done it, Rabbit!"

Hasty said nothing and ate his supper calmly enough. But the men noticed he kept casting his gaze at the massive heights of the range. Ellis endeavored to engage him in talk about the day's work, the one subject he showed any interest in. Hasty answered a few questions with his usual intelligence, but forgot to light the pipe he had carefully filled. For the rest of the evening he continued silent and participated none in the conversation. Yet Ancient's worry lessened, and he whispered to Goss:

"Give him something of a jolt, but he's all right. He'll be better in the morning."

At the first opportunity the hunter took Ellis aside and gravely said:

"That bone is bad medicine for Hasty. That means it's bad medicine for me. I forgot it might make his head queer. I will try to work him out of it."

He left the camp-fire to repeat some sacred formula.

When he returned his eyes glinted with pleasure. Hasty was sleeping quietly. Ancient declared:

"He's all right. Just give him a jolt. He won't have any spell this time."

Yet Hasty aroused them early in the morning by leaping from his blankets and screaming:

"Look! Enough of them up the range to chaw up this whole gulch! See 'em crawling over each other!"

He did not attempt to run away but hurriedly threw fuel on the fire and crowded so close to the flames as to scorch his clothing. And there was an awful fear in his face, as with teeth partly bared he pointed toward the snowy crests and hoarsely muttered:

"See 'em! Big as a herd of buf'lo. Look! One, two, three. All in line and leaving the rest to come down this way! Each as big as a ranch house. Oh, ——! Something awful is going to happen!"

Ancient placed a hand on the shivering shoulder and talked to him soothingly and managed to quiet him for a bit.

"They're all heading over the range, Joey," he repeated over and over. "There! The last one of them has gone from sight now."

"Waving and slapping his tail strong enough to knock a stone house over," muttered Hasty. He was relieved, but persisted, "They'll come back. They're cunning. They pretend to go away, but they always come back. They're waiting for some of us to move away from the fire. Only thing that scares 'em is fire."

He would have heaped on more fuel had not the Rabbit stopped him. To the others the Rabbit said:

"Go up or down the slope a little way and you'll see the smoke on the plains. A smoke from here can be seen far off. There must be no more fire."

But now Hasty was engaging their attention by exclaiming in amazement. He turned to Ellis and asked—

"When did you pull out of California Gulch, Pilgrim?"

"Last night, Joey," hurriedly broke in Ancient.

"He didn't come with us. He must-a follered at our heels after Skillings jumped us and I killed him."

Goss wheeled and glared at the Rabbit! The hunter nodded. Ancient piteously begged of them:

"Keep shet about it. Joey had to stop Skillings or be knifed by him."

"Not Joey!" corrected Hasty. "Big Bones. Everyone calls me that."

"Of course, Bones. We skipped out the gulch last night."

"We oughter traveled farther while it was dark. Those big —— was thicker'n spatter 'round the gulch. I'd rather a stayed to face the killing of Skillings than to meet 'em down here. They didn't dast come down into the gulch. Too many fires. Too much smoke."

"All gone, Joey—Bones. We can all go to work," cheerily said Ancient.

But there was no more work for Hasty. He crouched by the fire and kept his gaze on the heights. The Rabbit told Ellis:

"Stay with him and see he doesn't make a smoke. I'll scout and hunt, but it won't be safe to shoot off many guns."

Goss was thoroughly discouraged. Lomsom angrily demanded of Ancient:

"What'n —— you mean by fetching a crazy man along? Now we can't look for gold or silver."

"You haven't found any gold or silver, and you didn't have nothing to show us after gitting us down here," returned Ancient. "Hasty did find something, all that's been found. You've put in your time hiding up the slope and fearing your Injuns would git you. At least Joey wa'n't afraid of anything when he was hisself. And you're scared of your shadder. Pilgrim, go and dig if you want to. I'll stay here. I can handle him best."

"What he said was true? About Skillings?" demanded Ellis.

"We was asleep," explained Ancient Days. "Joey was in your place under the wagon. Skillings was crazy drunk. He must a thought Joey was you. First I knew he come over the tail-board, knife in hand, and vowing he'd cut a throat. The light from the fire showed him plain. He made for Joey under the second wagon. Joey rolled out 'tween the wheels and grappled with him. I was hunting for a knife or a ax or anything. But before I could git along it was all over. The Rabbit came up just as Skillings got his.

"We lit out, Joey 'n me. We got clear of the gulch and a short way down the valley. When morning came it found my pard to be Joe Hasty again. He didn't know he'd just quit the gulch and wanted to go there. I had to pretend it would mean trouble for me. Now you know it all, and I can't bear to talk about it."

Ellis tried to work on the claim, aided by Goss. But neither had any heart for the task. There remained the problem of getting Hasty back to a town. Lomsom went up toward the summit early in the morning and the Rabbit was out on a scout.

Goss threw down his pick and held up his blistered hands and surveyed them ruefully, and complained:

"What's the use? I was a fool to bank so heavily on this game. The cards were stacked against me from the start. The quicker we start for Cañon City or Pueblo with Hasty, the better it will be for all of us."

"We haven't failed entirely," said Ellis. "Hasty told me this was a rich proposition. We ought to be able to sell even if we can't work it. No question about the stuff being there."

"Then let's be getting back and be about selling it," said Goss.

They picked up their tools and started up the creek. They had covered but half the distance when Goss gave a yell and commenced running. Ellis then saw the thick volume of smoke rising from the camp. As the gambler panted up to the fire Hasty tossed on another armful of green stuff and explained:

"Those big —— can't see us now. Smoke hides us. Only thing that scares them, smoke and fire."

Goss kicked the smoking mess apart and with Ellis proceeded to stamp out the fire. As they finished, the gambler wrathfully asked—

"Where's Ancient?"

Hasty sat down and bowed his head and would not speak. But Ancient soon came running down the pass.

"Good land!" he yelled. "That smoke can be seen for eighty miles! Why, I just left him for a minute. He seemed to be asleep. There was one spot up the slope I was keen to look at. But now the mischief's been done!"

He had barely finished before Lomsom plunged on to the scene, his face distorted. He snarled—

"Do you folks hanker to be killed—in the Ute or Cheyenne way?"

"Shut up," curtly retorted Goss. "Hasty made the smoke."

"But why didn't you watch him?"

"We watched him more than you did. We got here first. Your hair's in as much danger as ours. You won't work. Why didn't you stay and watch him?"

"They could see it in Denver," gritted Lomsom.

"We'll pull out as soon as the Rabbit shows up. He must have seen it. He'll be here soon," said Goss.

He began rolling his blankets and gathering the supplies ready for the packs.

The Rabbit had seen it. By the time the two mules and the horses were brought up from their poor grazing ground the Indian appeared. With a glance he perceived their purpose and nodded with approval.

"It may be too late," he told them.

"Indians from the Plains will soon be crossing our path. It will be a race."

CHAPTER XII

RIDING THROUGH

HASTY gave no trouble when his companions started down the pass to strike the Huerfano before the Plains Indians could cut them off. He was so eager to get out of the mountains that it was with some difficulty he was restrained from riding far ahead. He fully comprehended the danger of encountering a war party of Cheyennes and Arapahos who were bringing a fight to the Utes. But so great was his fear of the imaginary, the real appealed to him as being insignificant.

Lomsom was full of fight so long as he knew Cheyennes and Arapahos were the foe; but he was frank to admit he would ride hard and far to escape meeting the Utes. "There are different kinds of mad," he explained to his companions. "I ain't scared of any Injun's war-mad. I wouldn't care a couple shoots of powder for a Ute if I hadn't lived with 'em, and been took in as one of 'em. And they do have a mortally strong medicine, let white folks make as much fun as they want to."

"Only a foolish man will make fun of a strong medicine," remarked the Rabbit.

Ancient Days regretted his inability to make one more prospecting trip high up the heights.

"I'd a struck it rich tomorrer," he declared. "Now them —— have busted all our plans and stopped me from being a rich man."

The Rabbit, scouting a short distance ahead after they were well under way, was thoroughly a red man. With aboriginal cunning he watched the path dropping before them and carefully estimated the chances of making the Huerfano before the war party from the east came in sight; also the chances of throwing off pursuit if discovered. The possible danger threw Goss back into his professional imperturbability. Ellis' face was eloquent with excitement, fear and resolution.

The six horsemen advanced at a rapid walk down the long slope, the eyes of each keenly watching the mouth of the pass where the eastern spur ended. Not until they had reached the end of this ridge could they learn the degree of their peril. When the Rabbit wheeled his horse and motioned for them to halt, they became impatient. A brisk ride of less than half a mile would take them beyond the spur. But the Rabbit insisted:

"Keep back while I ride on alone and see if the way is clear. If I wave my hand, come on, riding fast. If I wave both hands leave the mules and ride for your lives."

"This is a waste of time," complained Hasty, his eyes more concerned with the long ascent to the summit behind him than any danger ahead.

He trembled and clinched his hands convulsively as his gaze beheld something invisible to all the rest of the world. Ancient, used to his weird fancies, murmured:

"Easy, easy, pard. You know they never git down this far. You know it would be the death of them down this low. Air's so heavy down here it would plumb kill them."

"By Godfrey! They're down lower'n I ever seen them before," muttered Hasty, and he wiped his wet forehead and glared up the pass. "Look! Same three that hung back when t'others of the cussed herd went over the ridge to the west."

"Yes, but they're turning 'round. There! Now they're slowly going back," cried Ancient. "——! But see them pick up their heels. Why, Joey, they're running like deer to make the top of the pass!"

But this time the sick mind refused to be beguiled, although influenced by the power of suggestion.

"Running, nothing," Hasty muttered. "They ran for about ten rods, then slipped off to one side to hide in the rocks. Waiting. Just waiting for us. I tell you I want to git out of this."

"In a minute. Watch the Rabbit. Before you can count twenty he'll be waving a hand," soothed Ancient. "We're all right. See! He's nearly beyond the spur. Now he's slowing down. See! He's taking it easy. Not an Injun in sight. Now he'll wave a hand and we'll be jogging along."

The others were as fully confident the Rabbit would signal to them advance. Goss spoke to his horse and the little cavalcade got in motion. But the Rabbit still refrained from giving the expected signal. Lomsom was the first to take alarm. He reined in and with an oath, fiercely demanded:

"What's the matter with the —— fool? What makes him so slow. We either go ahead, or don't."

"We don't!" exclaimed Goss as the Rabbit suddenly wheeled his horse and bending low came flying back as fast as the animal could make the grade.

"But what does it mean?" asked Ellis. "If very near we were to leave the mules——"

Lomsom cut him off, barking:

"Means they're nearer then very near. Means we're cut off and at the best must wait for them to cross the mouth of the pass and swing into the Huerfano valley. Hope they meet the Utes and that all of them, both bands, git wiped out."

The Rabbit, a few rods away, called out to them:

"Turn back at once! Their scouts saw me."

"Fool had to show hisself!" snarled Lomsom. "Now all we can do is to ride up the pass and make the crossing down to the Rio."

"Not if the Utes are near," said the Rabbit. "They're after Utes. When they see only white men they may pass on. If they were coming from the mountains, after losing a fight, they would chase us."

"Looks like we are in a trap unless we cross the summit," decided the gambler. "I'm not going to wait for them to make up their minds whether they'll attack us or leave us."

Lomsom leaped from his horse and cried out:

"I'll fool 'em! Some of you git green stuff. 'Nough to make a good smoke. I'll make Ute smoke. They'll think a big band is here. While they're chawing on that we'll skin up the pass and travel south."

This strategem appealed to all as being very much worth while. All with the exception of Joe Hasty. He remained on his horse, staring up the slope and imagining he saw a terrible three-horned head peering from behind a huge boulder. Lomsom quickly had a hot fire of dry branches. He proceeded to throw on grass and green boughs supplied by the others. The Rabbit aided him in manipulating a blanket. They held back the smoke for a moment, then sent a puff high in the clear air. After completing the Ute signal for the discovery of an enemy the two men kicked the fire apart and Lomsom announced:

"That'll hold them back. Now we can take our time in making the summit, and we won't have to leave the mules."

With the Rabbit he rode ahead, the pack mules coming next. They moved along leisurely, the confidence of the two being shared by Ellis, Goss and Ancient Days. Over his shoulder Lomsom explained that the last third of the ascent was very steep and that the animals should be saved for it.

There were no signs of Indians below them. They were nearly up to the silver lode when Ellis raised an alarm which was quickly seconded by Ancient Days. Joe Hasty, riding in the rear beside Ellis, had yanked his horse about and was now galloping at break-neck speed down the path. Nonplussed by the man's sudden flight directly into the face of danger, Goss, Ellis, and Ancient could only stare after him. The Rabbit, however, flashed from the head of the little procession and rode recklessly to overtake the runaway. The others would have followed had not Lomsom very sensibly warned:

"If he can't catch him, we can't. If he does catch him we may have to cover the two of them, coming back."

The sun was several hours high for the outside world, but down between the two mountain walls the day was drawing to a close. The light was excellent while it lasted, and the figure of Hasty could be clearly followed as it rapidly decreased in size in the mad rush to the mouth of the pass. The Rabbit seemed to be a part of his horse as he skimmed after the unfortunate man. Despite Hasty's lead it did seem he would be overtaken.

Then, almost in the face of Hasty, there bloomed a puff of smoke, followed by the heavy, rumbling detonation of a rifle. Hasty, unharmed kept on. The Rabbit's horse slid on his haunches. More puffs of smoke rose from the rocks near the mouth of the pass. Hasty vanished from view. The Indian rode back up the path shouting:

"They are in the pass! The white man rode among them. We can't help him."

"Then let's run for it," cried Lomsom, and he started for the summit. In his anxiety to place as much distance as possible between himself and the war party he rapidly drew ahead of his companions, who were accommodating their pace to the

Rabbit's tired mount. He came abreast of the spot where Ellis and Hasty had found silver, and impatiently glanced back at the four men plodding slowly after him. An arrow slithered across the big mound of dirt and rock thrown up by Hasty and Ellis. It had been fired at him from his right and had flashed close to his head. Reacting automatically, he slipped off his horse and cast a second glance at the arrow. Then he hoarsely told himself—

"Utes!"

HE GLARED at the rocky slope, his rifle ready, but the hidden marksman did not shoot again. Once he thought he detected motion, but held his fire. Then came a thin, wailing cry and he knew a Ute scout had discovered him and was announcing the fact to more of his people. The Rabbit had seen and correctly interpreted Lomsom's pantomime, and urged his horse into a gallop and soon was standing beside Lomsom. The cry was repeated, farther up the pass and faintly answered from the same direction.

Lomsom licked his dry lips and hoarsely said:

"Don't need tell you what that means. There's the arrer. Bottled up, by——!"

"What band? Does the arrow tell?" asked the Rabbit, and he recovered the long shaft and examined it curiously.

"One of my own men shot that," whispered Lomsom. "That settles me if I'm caught. Last fall they thought I was trying to duck out when I left them. Now they're sure of it. They're after my hair. Red Crow never liked me for leading a band of young men. He'd be the first to light a fire on my belly. —— him!"

"The road to the summit is blocked. We must stop here. Get the horses down by the creek behind the rocks and dirt dug up by the crazy man and the Singing Man. It's as strong a place as any we can find. We'll have a talk with them. Maybe the scout didn't know who you are."

"We'll stop as we can't go on. But that Injun knew me all right," muttered Lomsom. "But what gnaws me worse'n anything is to know it's the smoke signal I made that brought 'em down on us. They was up the pass, high up, as the only way they could git there without traveling this way was to follow up the creek that flows north by Sheep mountain, just beyond the west ridge. This water we're on heads near the head of that creek. They come through Sand Hill Pass and down the valley of Huerfano for a bit, then swung south up into the range and must-a been planning to cross the summit and down toward the Rio. Then they saw my Ute smoke and knew no Utes were down here, and sent a scout. Now —— 's to pay!"

"What's the row?" snapped Goss, riding up.

"We're jumped by Utes, who are up the pass. We're in a trap," savagely explained Lomsom.

The gambler promptly announced:

"I'm through ducking and dodging. We have five rifles and plenty of belt-guns. If they want a fight they can have it. Let's get things ready before the light fails."

"And we mustn't forget the Indians below," reminded Ellis in a trembling voice. "As soon as it gets dark they'll be stealing up."

"Back behind the rocks and dirt the white men dug up," ordered the Rabbit. "I will scout the Utes. I will try to learn if they'll let us pass over the summit."

"That's a good talk, but make 'em say it on a pipe," urged Lomsom, his voice growing more confident. "They won't hurt you if you call your name. Still if they lay paws on you they'll hold you with them until they can finish us off."

"No man will put a hand on the Walking Dead Man," assured the Rabbit. "Better for him to put his hand on a ghost."

"Oh, poor Joey Hasty!" groaned Ancient Days.

"I'll scout down the pass and learn about him," promised the Rabbit. "But first for the Utes."

He turned his horse over for Goss to lead to cover and swiftly crossed to the opposite slope and disappeared among the rocks, where the Ute man had hidden when taking a shot at his former chief. Then he turned and slowly advanced up the slope. Once he paused and curiously examined the ground with his hands. Then he left cover and walked openly, chanting:

"The Walking Dead Man goes to speak with friends. Ghosts walk beside him but will not hurt his friends. Where are the young men who followed the White Chief? Where are the warriors who follow Red Crow?"

Repeating this over and over he held on until above the spot where he and his white friends had pitched their camp. Suddenly a voice called out:

"We hear the voice of the Walking Dead Man. It is very hard to see him. Our hands are empty. Let him come among the rocks and smoke and talk."

The Rabbit halted and replied:

"There are ghosts beside me. They tell me to stay here. We will talk with the rocks between us. Those ghosts will not hurt me, but it is not good for Red Crow and his men to have them too near. Now they are whispering that one of your young men feels death very close."

There was a few moments of silence, then Red Crow admitted:

"There is a young man here who has lost his medicine and his heart is heavy. We will make a new medicine and make his heart glad."

"It is bad the young man has lost his medicine. Voices whisper in my ear that new medicine is weak."

"Did the Walking Dead Man come to tell us of the lost medicine?" asked Red Crow after another brief interval of silence.

"They told me to come and speak of a man who has turned red. He is called the White Chief of the Utes. The Walking Dead Man is leading him over the mountains."

Again a silence. Then Red Crow was saying:

"When he goes over the mountains he goes as a ghost. Or he must grow wings like a bird and fly very high through the air."

"That is a strange talk for the Walking Dead Man to carry back to a chief to the Utes," gravely replied the Rabbit.

"He is no longer a chief among the Utes. He led a band of young men, foolish men, who would not listen to Ouray. We took him in and fed him and kept him from white men who would kill him. Before the last snow he ran away, then came back with his mouth filled with lies. On the pipe he promised to stay. After the snow left the valleys he ran away again. He promised on the pipe and lied. Now he brings white men into the mountains. Now he has made a Ute smoke. He must die."

"Only a man whose head has been touched by a very strong medicine would make a Ute smoke after running away from the Utes," argued the Rabbit.

This seemed to make a deep impression on the Indians, for nearly five minutes passed before Red Crow answered, saying:

"If his head has been touched by a big medicine he can not be hurt by the Utes. But let him come to us. The Walking Dead Man is very wise. No man whose head has not been touched would run from the Utes and then make a smoke to call them to him."

This satisfied the Rabbit that as yet the Utes did not suspect the presence of the Plains Indians at the mouth of the pass. He replied:

"I will tell the White Chief, but he may not understand my words. His head is queer. Is the mountain top open for me and my white friends?"

"There is a man with you who stole a Stone-medicine and who smoked a medicine-pipe. There is another man with you who rode a medicine-pony. Those two men must be given to us."

"That leaves one man and the Walking Dead Man," summed up the Rabbit.

Red Crow promptly promised:

"The other white man and the Walking Dead Man can walk out of these mountains and will not be hurt. Red Crow will say this on a pipe. But we must have the two white men and the man who is not red or white."

Now the Rabbit was convinced neither band of Indians knew of the other's presence in the pass. He also believed he and his friends were about halfway between the two camps. He called back to the Ute chief:

"I will carry Red Crow's talk to the white men. Tell the young man who lost his medicine it is very bad for him."

With that he rapidly stole back to the shaft on the silver lode and softly called his own name. Satisfied he would not be shot by mistake he advanced behind the pile of debris and abruptly reported:

"They are willing for Ancient Days and me to leave the mountains. They say Goss and the Singing Man must die. They say Lomsom must come to them."

"By ——! I'll die hard!" cried Lomsom.

"They do not know the Cheyennes and Arapahos are down the pass. They will not make a strong attack on us till morning."

Finding Lomsom's hand he pressed something into it and said:

"I picked it up among the rocks. It must have been dropped by the young man who shot an arrow at you. I told Red Crow one of his young men was near death. He said a medicine had been lost."

"I know what it is," eagerly said Lomsom, running the article through his fingers. "Close to death? I should say he was. He's Sharp Lance. And the young fool has lost his medicine necklace. That's why his arrer missed me. He'd dropped the necklace! The shells came from the Pacific coast, from the Gulf of Californy, as near as I could figure out. Traded from tribe to tribe. If he ain't killed mighty soon he'll die of fear."

He continued gloating gleefully as if the loss of the necklace was some distinct advantage to him and his companions.

The Rabbit advised:

"Open a pack and get out some food, but don't light a fire. Keep a sharp watch. I am going down the valley to scout the other camp."

HE CROSSED the creek and vanished among the scattered fragments of limestone that dotted the climbing valley. The sun was below the western ridge, but it was yet day on the high peaks that flank the eastern approach to the summit of the Sangre de Cristo Pass. With the Rabbit between them and the Plains raiders the four men gave their attention to possible danger from up the slope. Lomsom surprized his companions by suddenly throwing off his clothing until he was clad only in his dark woolen shirt and moccasins. Armed with a revolver and a knife he curtly warned:

"When I come back I'll come on the jump. Don't shoot. No Ute will run up to this place."

"What are you about?" demanded Goss. "The Rabbit is scouting. He won't like your going out."

"It happens that the Rabbit is just another Injun. All his sugary white-talk don't change his color. So it's none of his business where I go or what I do. I said I was going out and take a look. The Utes know we can't sneak away without hosses, and they know they'll hear us if we try it with hosses. So I'm going out while my medicine feels strong."

And they heard the rattle of the shell necklace as Lomsom secured it around his brawny throat.

"Go to the —— as far as I care," growled Goss. "But if you come on the jump, with a pack of Utes yelping at your heels you'll probably get potted. We'll fire mighty fast, and it's too dark to tell you from a redskin."

Lomsom said nothing, but dodged among the rocks and was lost to view. Goss suggested—

"He's going to make a break and leave us to pay the fiddler."

"He'd a kept his clothes on and took along his rifle and a chunk of grub if he was up to that caper," murmured Ancient Days. "And he'd took a hoss. But I wish he'd stayed here. The Rabbit's the one to do the scouting."

Ellis possessed the average amount of courage but there was something fearfully sickening in the thought that the morrow might find him a captive among the Utes for the second and last time. When he dramatized himself into such an awful fate and added, as the most exquisite torture, the thought of his sister waiting, waiting for his return he was fair beside himself. Goss heard him groan and whispered:

"What is it, Frank?"

"For ——'s sake, Nate, talk to me!" he muttered between clinched teeth.

"I know how it is," soothed the gambler. "Nerves get on the jump a bit at times. And what you imagine is always worse than the thing you have to meet and go through with."

"It's the blackest ——, what I've been thinking of."

"Then forget it. In the morning with good light we'll make a fine fight. Good position here. Why, four white men ought to stand off a hundred Indians. The Rabbit's good as another four. Don't lick yourself before the Injuns begin their catwauling and wild shooting. Then again, how are the Utes and those fellows down the pass going to get along together when they find they're stalking the same game? A bloody fight. And we walk away."

"Thanks. If it hadn't been for thinking of Annie it wouldn't have been so bad," whispered Ellis.

"Then thank God your sister isn't here," murmured Gross.

"I believe I'm all right now. At the worst we can stop them from taking us alive, Nate."

"Of course. But we won't draw to that

hand until we have to. I'm still set on being a vegetable grower and hen raiser. Keep your mind on the next minute. Watch the creek."

With his courage refreshed Ellis sat with his back to a rock, his rifle across his knees, and stared into the darkness that surrounded them. Goss crept to a boulder above the shaft. Ancient took a similar position below the shaft. The light was gone from the peaks. The stars took over the care of the heavens and brought into cold relief the snowy heights, but revealed them as being bluish-white.

Another hour passed and the Rabbit jumped Ellis into a rare fright by suddenly fording the creek directly opposite his position.

Fortunately for the Indian he called out his name before entering the stream. Goss heard the slight disturbance and crawled back to the shaft. Ancient Days, keen of hearing this night, also joined his companions.

"Where is the White Chief?" whispered the Rabbit.

They told him, and he disapproved, saying:

"He can do no good that way. He may do harm. The man Hasty is safe in the camp below. His head has been touched and turned soft by a great mystery. The Cheyennes and Arapahoes will not touch him. I saw him in their camp. I hoped to get a peace-road through the camp. I crawled close, but from the talk between two scouts I learned we must fight for it. They believe we are friends of the Utes; for we made a smoke to call them in. They don't know the Utes are so close. They believe they will come down the valley of the Huerfano. They have scouts out that way. They will come after us when it grows light. The Utes will come down after us when it grows light. When they discover each other and are fighting we must fall back to the ridge to the east and follow down the flank to the mouth of the pass."

"But our horses?" asked Goss.

"We must leave them. Horses can't go among rocks as men can. They would soon overtake us."

"Looks darned serious," muttered Ancient Days. "If they don't happen to arrive at the same time it'll take tall fighting to keep from under their little fires."

"I will make a medicine for those going to war. I will go to water. To be a strong medicine, the prayer should be made for four nights. Stay here and keep watch while I go to water. I will say the prayer four times. That is the best I can do."

He threw off his clothes and walked to the bank of the creek and stood facing the east after the immemorial practise of his ancestors. Then he stared down at the little stream and in a voice that carried far began his petition to the Red Spirits of the East. Even Ellis forgot some of his fear as he marveled how one who had taken on so much of the white man's culture could have faith in pagan practises. Ancient Days was more optimistic and hoarsely whispered:

"It's got to do some good. Some red medicines are powerful strong."

"Deuces and fours," muttered Goss.

"*Hayi! Yu!* Listen," the Rabbit was invoking. "Now instantly we have lifted up the red war-club. Quickly their souls shall be without motion. There under the earth where the black war-clubs shall be moving like ball sticks in a game, there their souls shall be never to reappear. We cause it to be so. They shall never go and lift up the war-club. We cause it to be so. There under the earth the black war-clubs and the black fog have come together as one for their covering. The black fog shall never move from them. We cause it to be so.

"Instantly the souls of my people and friends shall be moving about in the Seventh Heaven. Their souls shall never break in two. So shall it be. Quickly their souls shall move on high, where they shall be going about in peace. Let them shield themselves with the red war-whoop. Instantly grant they shall never become blue. *Yu!*"

"By Godfrey! That oughter rip the hide off'n the redskins," whispered Ancient Days.

Goss told him to be silent for the hunter was repeating his sacred formula and hoping the Red Spirits in the East would heed the prayer, four times repeated. Red, symbolic of success, was applied to the war-whoop, the club and the shield. The petition, divided into two parts, first invoked death for the enemy and annihilation of their souls, black being symbolic of oblivion. Death was doled out to the defeated by the Black Spirits who dwell in the West. Blue, or failure, was inflicted by the Blue Spirits in the North, whence success never came. Four times he loudly voiced his appeal, then stepped into the water.

ON REGAINING the bank he took a piece of root from his shirt and gave a piece to each of his friends and told them to chew it and spit the juice on their hands and legs.

"That's a powerful strong medicine you've made, Rabbit," earnestly declared Ancient as he vigorously chewed the bit of root. "It ought to yank —— out of a stubborn mule."

"It will help, but how much I don't know," somberly replied the hunter. "But those who would lay down a blue path for an enemy should go to water for four nights. The Red Spirits in the East heard me, but I don't know how much they will help when the medicine is made in one night. If you white men have any medicine call upon it. I will not chew the root as my day of death has been named."

"I know of no medicine that's as unselfish as yours, Rabbit," slowly said Goss. "I'm banking on it and no other."

Ancient chewed the root and caressed the haft of his long knife. Ellis chewed the root and bowed his head and gave way to despair as he estimated the odds against them. When in the Ute camp they had had something to trade for life, and a storm had come to conceal their flight. Now the heavens were majestically serene and utterly indifferent to the biological tragedy awaiting the first light.

A gasping cry somewhere among the rocks west of the silver lode brought them to sharp attention. Then all was silent until they heard the soft footsteps of a man running slyly. The steps crossed to their side of the valley path and the panting breath of the unseen became audible. Ellis picked up a heavy fragment of rock. The Rabbit announced:

"It is Lomsom. No Indian would come to us like that."

In another moment Lomsom was among them, lying on the ground and puffing for breath. The four listened for sounds of pursuit but could hear nothing. When he could speak Lomsom explained:

"Got the feller who lost his medicine, —— him! I knew he'd sneak down into those rocks and hunt for it. And I got him. Sharp Lance was the skunk's name. Rode with me on many a hoss-stealing. I heard him softly crawling among the rocks, using both hands in brushing the ground for his shell necklace.

"I was on him and had my knife through him before he reckoned any one was near. Tried to yell out, but he couldn't make his last sound carry. One of my own band, and turned against me to catch up with Red Crow! That's gratitude for you. Let the Crow lead 'em. Mebbe they'll build a fire on me but I'll be dead before they do it. And I'll die hard and take some along with me."

The Rabbit silenced him and briefly explained about the medicine, and gave him a piece of the medicine-root. But Lomsom, elated at having killed a man, tossed the root away and boasted:

"My own medicine seems to be working pretty strong. If the night was longer I'd sneak up there and git Red Crow's hair. I can feel my medicine working in my fingers and toes. Mix it with another medicine? No, siree!"

"You will need a very strong medicine very soon," murmured the Rabbit. "I see black fog near you."

Then to Goss he whispered:

"If I am killed some one must take a talk to the Indian Nation. My people must know why I do not come."

"You are the Walking Dead Man to the Utes. They won't harm you."

"In a fight bullets and arrows don't stop to ask a man his name. And there will be Cheyenne and Arapaho bullets and arrows. My soul would always be blue if the talk doesn't reach my people."

"If you cash in and I escape, I'll carry your talk," the gambler promised.

"If I cash in and Ellis escapes, he will take the talk. If Ancient Days is the only one to get clear, he shall carry it. And if the mine is ever sold your share shall go to your people."

"That is good. We have two hours before the Utes commence stealing down and the Plains men begin coming up the slope. When they discover each other we can fall back to the ridge behind us."

"You're medicine's all wrong," grumbled Lomson. "We have something to hide behind here as good as any rocks along the ridge. We have water, grub and guns. We'll stick while the two bands fight it out. Then we'll lick the winner. Winner ain't going to feel like bringing a fight to us."

"We're well fixed to make a fight right here," agreed Ellis. "What do you say, Frank?"

"The Rabbit is running this game," the gambler answered. "I'll admit I haven't much stomach for crossing the creek to climb part way up the ridge, just to turn and work along the flank to the end of the spur. Your vote, Ancient?"

"I'm following the Rabbit's medicine," was the sleepy response.

"Goss, you almost made a real war-talk," grunted Lomson. "An Injun always thinks first of running away. I'm for sticking and giving 'em a fight."

"You shall give them a fight," whispered the Rabbit. "You shall show them and us how a brave man should die."

"—— you! You're riled because I wouldn't chaw that piece of root."

"Shut up, Lomson," Goss sternly told him. "Save your ugliness for the morning. The Rabbit's all right. He can steal safely away any time and leave us to play our hands. He's sticking to help us out."

"All right. Let him stick as long as I do then," mumbled Lomsom.

"I will keep close to you," slowly said the Rabbit. "You are neither red nor white. But you shall have your fight. If you are not afraid when the light comes, prove it by fighting at my side."

"See here, I ain't no crazy Kiowa leader of the Ka-itsenko to anchor myself by a medicine lance and be killed in my tracks rather than to run for it," Lomson explained. "I ain't going to git killed just to prove I'm a brave man. But I'll show you I'm both white and chuck full of fighting. If I ain't at your side, Injun, I'll be near enough for you to hear me hooting."

"This is all talk," said the Rabbit. "Ancient Days is very wise. He sleeps and grows strong. Let us rest while we can, for the Red Spirits in the East will soon kick off their blankets and rise and bring us a new day. Don't shoot at me when I return."

Before any one could remonstrate he was stealing from their hiding place to scout up the pass.

It seemed abnormal to Ellis that Ancient could sleep. With perhaps only two hours of life left, how could a man slumber? Ellis kept his eyes fixed on the east as he listened to Ancient's snoring. There was no sign of the coming light, but like one under a spell he stared at the well-defined crest of the eastern ridge. He fell to wondering where he would be at the end of another day.

It seemed such a pity that mortals could not leap over the pivotal moment of danger as one jumps across a narrow chasm. So many hours he had wasted. Now there were two or three times sixty minutes left for him. As an escape from such a distressing mood he endeavored to work himself into a savage hate against the Indians. But he could not keep the gentle sister from his thoughts.

"If I don't get through, tell Annie what I thought about her. You know," he whispered to Goss.

"Shut up, Nate!" muttered Goss. And to relieve his feelings he shook Ancient and requested, "Will you stop that —— snoring?"

"Just a little cat nap. Must a felt sleepy," apologized Ancient.

Lomson lighted his pipe. Goss objected, but was told:

"Why not? They know we're here. I ain't fool enough to upset my own dish even if that —— Rabbit thinks I be."

"If we break even we'll have the Rabbit to thank, I'm thinking," replied Goss.

"No worse for two to smoke than one." "And he lighted a cigar. "Smoke, Frank?"

"I don't feel like doing anything I'd usually do," explained Ellis in refusing the cigar.

Lomson laughed mirthlessly and reminded:

"Maybe your last chance. I figger that the Ute medicine-pipe has reached out to catch you two fellers down here."

Ellis shivered. Goss remarked:

"Maybe a white medicine has reached out to catch you, Lomson, for the man you knifed in Pete Dotson's wagon train. I won't count the man you killed through the window of Allen's saloon."

"Bah! There ain't no such thing as a white medicine."

Yet the seed of a new fear was planted in the renegade's mind by the gambler's suggestion. He began to wonder if the dead man's ghost had arranged the situation And his pipe went out and he did not bother to relight it.

Ellis rubbed his eyes and stared incredulously at the east, and with a catch in his voice whispered:

"Sky's reddening! I watched it every second and never see it when it began to change! Lord! I wonder what's going to happen to us!"

"We'll pull through flying," encouraged Goss, still mouthing the stub of his cigar.

THERE was a distinct touch of rose along the skyline. As the four men stared, the color deepened to a bloody red. The Rabbit, standing behind them, announced his return by saying:

"A Ute or a Cheyenne scout could have brained you all. Make ready. The Red Gods of the East are coming up the sky. *Hayi! Yu!* Listen. Now instantly we have lifted up the red war-club. The black fog shall never move from them. We cause it to be so."

Ancient blinked his eyes at the red east and asked—

"Time's come for us to do something?"

"They'll be here any time," nervously warned Ellis. "We ought to pick our places and make ready."

"Bring the horses from the creek," commanded the Rabbit.

"Horses won't help us much among all those rocks. We can make faster time afoot," remonstrated Goss.

"We're going through them. Through the Cheynnes and Arapahos. Bring the horses," said the Indian.

"We don't take to the rocks? "Or wait here for them?" cried Ellis.

"We ride through them. My medicine tells me some of us will get through and some will ride into the Black West, where it is always growing dark. Bring the horses for those who will reach the Arkansas and those who will end their ride in the Darkening Land."

"Well, I'm game for that," muttered Lomson. And he quickly stripped to the skin, wearing only his belt of weapons and carrying his rifle.

Goss and Ellis brought up the horses and a minute was spent in satisfying each rider that the animals and accoutrements were fit for the mad dash. The Rabbit was naked except for the shirt he wore as a breechcloth. Each man stood by his horse behind the high pile of dirt and rock excavated from the silver lode. Under his breath the Rabbit repeated some formula. A slight rasping sound, such as a gun barrel might make in scratching against a rock, came to them from down the slope.

"They are nearer than I thought," murmured the Rabbit. "This will be a very good fight."

The Utes, stealing down the slope, heard the sound and supposed it was made by the whites retreating. This was evidenced by the loud cry of discovery they raised. Then they came on, yelling madly and with no pretense at concealment.

The Rabbit was first in the saddle. To Goss he cried:

"Tell my people! Here by my side, Lomson. You shall race me into the mouth of black death. Let the Singing Man sing. It is good medicine to fight singing, to die singing."

And with the former White Chief of the Utes beside him the Rabbit dashed from behind the ridge of dirt and into the rough path and wheeled down the slope. And as he rode he sounded the fierce war-cry of his people; the ancient defiance his forefathers had hurled at the Iroquois more than a century before along the Great Warriors' Path.

Ellis rode behind the two, and at his heels pounded Ancient Days and Goss. Ellis sang, albeit his voice quavered at times. Ancient screamed like a wild animal. Goss was silent, the fragment of a cigar still clinched between his teeth.

The Cheyennes and Arapahos were amazed to be attacked by white men and Utes. An Arapaho had talked with Hasty, who readily betrayed the strength of his friends, his deranged mind failing to comprehend any danger except from the twenty-foot dinosaurs. Equally surprised were the Utes on sighting their old foes coming to meet them. Neither band could understand the status of the shouting, cursing, singing white men and the Indian riding down the valley at a mad gallop. And to give a more deadly finale to the bit of drama the sun boosted itself above the ridge and flooded the sloping valley with the morning light.

"*Hayi! Yu!* Listen," thundered the Rabbit.

And he opened fire on the mixed band of Plains Indians with his rifle. There was some thirty of them, and the bullet broke a man's leg and he attempted to drag himself to cover while his companions darted to each side in something of a panic. Lomson shouted a Ute defiance and commenced shooting. Ancient Days turned in the saddle and gave attention to the Utes, and with a string of shots, sent them scurrying to the rocks.

Now that they had frantically withdrawn to both sides the foe ahead emerged from their amazement. Arrows whizzed to meet the five riders, then criss-crossed their path as they dashed between the hidden lines. Lomson's horse was shot in the flank by an arrow, and got out of control. With a mad leap he cleared a boulder and landed among eight or ten of the crouching savages. Instantly the Rabbit was after him, but yelling to Goss—

"Go through!"

So Goss became the leader, and he spat out the cigar butt to hold the reins in his teeth. As he rode furiously, with Ellis almost up to his stirrup, he raked the rocks with two hand-guns. Ellis was singing hoarsely, a bit madly, and was shooting his revolver at random. Ancient's guns were empty and he rode flattened out on his horse, the long knife clutched in his hand.

Now the Utes were firing guns as well as arrows and were shooting at the Plains warriors as well as at the whites. The three riders were nearly outside the hidden lines, and Cheyenne and Arapaho discovered the Utes were too great a menace to be even partly ignored. They concentrated all their attention on the Utes.

As the fire from the rocks dropped, indicating the three riders had passed through the dangerous lane, Goss glanced back, anxious to learn the Rabbit's fate. The next moment he was bringing his horse to a halt and swinging him about to race back up the slope.

Ancient shouted—

"On! On!"

And he seized the bridle of Ellis's horse and restrained the half-crazed young man from following his friend back into the danger zone.

THE gambler's purpose was apparent. The Rabbit was riding from behind a pile of rocks and was waving something above his head. Lomson was not with him. Scarcely a shot was fired at Goss as he mounted the slope and gained the Indian's side.

For the time being the Plains Indians were ignoring the white men. They knew they were in for a stiff fight with their hereditary foe and would need a powerful medicine to escape from the pass alive. Never dreaming the Utes were near they had left their ponies near the mouth of the pass while they paused to collect the white scalps. They could laugh at the Utes in the open, but meeting them in the mountains was never a smiling affair.

Practically unhindered, the gambler wheeled and rode down the slope beside the Rabbit. The Rabbit reeled in the saddle and continued to wave the bloody scalp, offering it to the inspection of the Red Gods in the East as he laboriously shouted his prowess as a mighty warrior. The two overtook Ancient and Ellis, but neither of the white men could discover just how badly the red hunter was hurt. He seemed to be covered with blood.

Now the Rabbit was all red in his mind. The white man's culture was sloughed off just as the white man's clothing had been discarded. He was back to red fundamentals.

"I am riding into the Darkening Land, white men," he gasped. "Tell my people—Lomson died a very brave man. He killed three before they dragged him from his horse. The Walking Dead Man killed three and wounded another. Two were alive when I rode from the rocks, a Cheyenne, a Arapaho— Soon I will tell Lomson how you men got away."

"The Indians are fighting among themselves. Rein in while I plug some of those wounds," cried Ancient.

"Ride on! Ride on! Gather up the ponies at the mouth of the pass. Let the Singing Man sing. Make the Huerfano and Pueblo. Ho! ho! I see many dark houses. Lomson would not chew the medicine root. Now he is ahead of me. He and the friend I killed are waiting. A man must go to water for four nights."

He jerked his head far back and opened his eyes very wide. Then with a supreme effort to obey the command of his dying mind he faintly cried—

"Tell my people!"

And he would have fallen from his horse had not Ancient and Goss pressed close on either side.

For another mile the living and the dead rode madly, and slowed down only when they came to the camp of the raiders. Ancient Days gave a yell and leaped from his horse and ran to where Joe Hasty sat with his back to a rock. Goss directed:

"Ellis, help me with the Rabbit. He must be hidden where they won't find him. They'll be coming soon. Ancient, bring in all the ponies."

And he pointed to the herd.

Hasty was staring blankly at his friends, as though completely bewildered. Ancient ran to the herd. Goss and Ellis lifted the Rabbit from the saddle and rolled him in a Cheyenne blanket to prevent a trail of blood revealing his hiding place. They carried him among the rocks east of the camp and placed him in a niche, much as the Utes bury their dead, and left him.

"He was the best one of the lot," muttered Ellis, his throat aching.

"—— knows he was a man," agreed the gambler. "But hurry! I hear firing."

They raced to the camp and found Ancient and Hasty mounted, each ready to lead half a dozen ponies. They sprang into their saddles and took their share of picket ropes and started off to the north. Faint yells caused them to glance back up the pass. A dozen Indians were running madly pursued by the Utes.

"Tried to trap us and bagged themselves," shouted Ellis, for the first pausing to realize he had bridged the fatal morning hour and in all probability would live to see the little ranch house on the Arkansas.

Ancient turned and winked expressively to the gambler and Ellis, and cried:

"Joey can't remember a thing about being clouted over the head by a Injun up above. He's just come to his senses."

With no danger of being overtaken the four rode more slowly and Hasty explained—

"Can't remember nothin—" He gently felt of his head to locate some wound—"Last thing I remember I was down in the mouth along of not finding a pile of gold. We was at the fire, talking. Must a been lambasted from behind."

"Crept up and busted you on the head from behind," said Ancient. "You up and run like a madman. Injuns didn't pay no 'tention to you as the rest of us was keeping 'em busy."

"Yes, yes. We understand," said Goss. "Now they're fighting at the mouth of the pass. We'll pick up a bit. Ancient, lead us to the Huerfano."

Faint yells and occasional puffs of smoke caused many a backward glance. Tiny figures could be seen making for the open country where the Plains Indians always fight their best.

"It's all so queer and uncalled for," muttered Hasty. "To think I lost all that good fighting."

"Good fighting for you yet, Joey," assured Ancient, beaming like a proud parent. "And it was you'n the younker who found the silver vein. All we did find."

Hasty glanced wildly about and demanded—

"But where's Lomson and the Rabbit?"

"They went on ahead," tersely called out Goss. "Do we follow along this creek to the Huerfano?"

Ancient replied in the affirmative, and riding wide, they rushed their ponies until all sounds of the fighting ceased. An hour later Ancient was crying:

"By Godfrey, Joey! Now you'll git your belly full of fighting! There's a big band and they've seen us!"

A large number of horsemen were approaching from the Huerfano. Hasty, quicker of gaze than his friend, exclaimed:

"Soldiers! I see a flag. That hogs out all the bad luck."

As the two bands drew nearer together a man spurred ahead and came on at a gallop.

"Whip King!" yelled Goss. "Old Whip King!"

"Good land!" bawled Whip King in greeting. "Always find you in a fighting corral. Heads to the center! You've had a brush. You've licked some hoss-Injuns."

A lieutenant came up, and to him and Whip King the gambler rapidly told of the fight. In turn he was informed that the forty horsemen were detailed from the First Colorado Cavalry to discourage fighting between the Plains and Mountain Indians; and that Whip King was taking advantage of the expedition to look for gun-runners in Sangre de Cristo Pass. The lieutenant gave a hurried order for rations to be supplied to the four men, and then the cavalry swept on, hoping to catch the warring bands at the mouth of the pass.

CHAPTER XIII

WAITING

SPECULATION in mining property increased. While Goss and Ellis were making plans at the ranch and holding Annie's horrified interest by relating fragments of their adventures, Eastern capitalists with plenty of greenbacks were rapidly seeking more investments in Colorado where gold was plenty. A representative of one such group came to Cañon City. He happened into Hall's place while Joe Hasty and Ancient Days were celebrating on credit their return to the Arkansas. The man listened to their boastings and made inquiries. Ancient submitted for his inspection the samples Hasty happened to have in his clothes when escaping from the pass.

At first the Easterner refused to be enthusiastic over silver. Gold was what he wanted. But after reports came in of rich silver finds near the heads of the southwestern tributaries to Clear Creek and men began talking of assays from other silver districts that ran as high as two thousand dollars a ton, the newcomer displayed interest. He took the samples to an assayer and was told they showed eight hundred and twenty-seven dollars per ton. He promptly changed his attitude and expressed a desire to meet the surviving partners.

Goss and Ellis were notified and hurried to Cañon City, and as a result of the conference it was agreed the Easterner should visit the lode. The Espiñosa murders had alarmed the valley more than an attack by a tribe of Indians, but profits call as loudly sometimes as bugles. The danger of visiting the pass was slight, however, now that the cavalry was patrolling the Huerfano and foothills. Goss and Ancient went with the Easterner, escorted by a strong bodyguard. Ellis gave the gambler power to dispose of his claim and returned to the ranch.

It was tedious waiting, and Annie annoyed her brother by stressing the desirability of ranch profits over mining profits. He never suspected she was trying to fortify him against disappointment. But he had his day when Goss galloped up to the ranch and loudly shouted:

"Sold out! Fifteen thousand dollars on the way to Kountze Brothers' bank in Denver to be deposited to your credit. Here's the express company's receipt. We accepted ninety thousand and divided it into six parts, although Lomsom didn't stake a claim. He's dead, but he may have folks somewhere. He failed to lead us to gold, but if it hadn't been for him we wouldn't have found silver. And he died game. His share will be held by the bank while they search for heirs. Failing to find any it's to be distributed among the four of us and the Rabbit's people."

Then he was off his horse and taking the girl's hands and shaking them and greeting:

"Howd'y do, Miss Annie. How's it seem to have a man of property for a brother? I always said old Frank would strike it. Fifteen thousand is far from a fortune, but it isn't to be sneezed at."

"Fifteen thousand dollars," she slowly repeated. Then she burst into tears and frantically flung her arms around her brother, and cried:

"Why, Frank! We can go back with our heads up! We can go anywhere. And now we can pay Mr. Goss. Pay him what he paid for the ranch, and the money he advanced for everything."

"Good land! Really sold that hole for ninety thousand!" gasped Ellis. Then he added, "There're some things I can't ever pay Nate for."

Goss, nonplussed, exclaimed:

"Pay for the ranch? Why, Miss Annie, this place is owned——"

"Don't," she commanded. "It's owned by you. That man, Ancient, told me all about it just before you started on the trip. Now we can square accounts."

"I'll wring that old fool's neck! Then we're not partners any more? Frank and I have been pards, Miss Annie. I'd hoped to be a partner with you two in running the ranch."

"Partners, yes, so long as we stay here," she agreed. "But first we'll pay back all you put in and start with a new account book."'

"That's the talk, Nate. Annie always did have a head. Come in and we'll draw up a new agreement."

"Nonsense. You can't pay me now. A check will be no good till the money reaches the bank. That can wait. But here's something that can't wait—" he patted a saddle bag—"I'm riding to the Indian Nation to tell the Rabbit's people. And I'm fool enough to think I can carry his share in gold and greenbacks to them. I must be going at once. By the way, you'll be glad to hear one of the bloody Espiñosa murderers has run out of chips. John McCannon of California Gulch struck the trail near Red Hill and followed it to a camp in a cañon on Oil Creek, southwest of Pike's Peak. He shot one. T'other man and a boy escaped."

This should have been news of momentous comfort, for the series of mysterious and brutal murders, committed without motive, had upset the nerves of the valley and various camps. The girl scarcely heeded it.

"You're on your way now to tell the Indian's people how he died?" she said.

"I promised. The Rabbit was a great man. They'll be glad to know he made a fighting finish and can not be executed."

"You surely are not leaving until you've eaten," she said. "Frank, take his horse away."

Her brother was quick to obey, and while he was gone the girl asked:

"But you're not going to gamble any more? Getting this money won't make you do that? You'll come back and be our partner in running the ranch?"

Goss stared at her steadily and finally replied:

"I'll quit cards for cabbages. I'll come back, if——"

"If what?" she asked as he paused.

"Well, Miss Annie, that's what I'll tell you when I come back."

She turned to the door, saying:

"I must see about something to eat. You must settle down and be respectable. What young men are left us by the war shouldn't waste time at card games. You'll find us here if you return before winter."

BUT he did not come before winter. He wrote from the Indian Nation telling how he had made his promise good; of the pride of the Rabbit's people. He said nothing about the running fight he made in taking the money through, when he was forced to shoot his way through Charlie Harrison's band of guerrillas just before the Osage Indians fell upon them and killed them to a man.

In part the letter ran:

> I've been doing a lot of thinking since I met the Rabbit's people. The war seems very close to me, now I'm out of the mountains. I can't get rid of the notion it's my business, and not something merely to get news about from the old California Crossing.
>
> I've lived the last two years shut up in gulches and with a shut-up mind. Think of my surprize in running into DeLouge. He's enlisting a company for the South. Keen to have me join. Had to tell him my sympathies were north of the line. It would have been death to have said this to some men down here, but DeLouge is a real man. He told me the best way to travel and got me a fresh horse. It was mighty nice of him to say he hoped we'd never meet until after the war. So I'm going in. But I'd rather be a rancher on the Upper Arkansas than anything I can think of. Maybe that's another reason why I'm going in.
>
> I've lived selfish. Now I must practice what I like second best. But if my medicine holds good I shall come back. I don't expect to find you two there. Maybe you'll leave word in Cañon City with Mr. Hall as to where you'll locate in the East. Both of you will understand I don't like to do what I'm going to do. I don't believe the war can last more than a year, yet it's a bad mess. I seemed to be in excellent position to chip in. No brothers, sisters, nor folks. I'm thinking wars ought to be fought by men like me who haven't any relations. How's that?

Annie folded up the letter, carefully placed it inside the discarded account book, and said:

"He's gone, Frank. We shall never see him again. I've driven him from gambling into the war."

Then she ran to her room, her face no longer pink-and-white.

The summer passed dully for the young couple. Frazer and the neighbors continued to help with advice. Annie bought an account book in Cañon City and Frank grew accustomed to being the possessor of fifteen thousand dollars. Goss' name was entered as an equal partner, and the girl was very exact in her bookkeeping. Her brother was eager to enlist but she dissuaded him.

That summer was hard on ranchers. An unprecedented drouth dried up the West. Stocks of merchandise and provisions in Colorado were thinned out almost to the vanishing point, and the demands made by Montana's new mines cut into even this slender margin.

One night after the harvesting was finished and Annie was busy with her accounts her brother interrupted her by asking:

"Why bother, Annie. We've made no money this season."

"But I must have a record to show Mr. Goss."

"Annie, Nate won't come back. He may be dead. No letter all this time. No, Nate won't come back."

She collapsed with her head on her book. As he tried to comfort her she piteously moaned: "My ——, Frank. Can't you even let me pretend? Can't you let me try to fool myself if it helps me just a bit to get through a day?"

"We'll quit here. We'll go to Cañon City, Annie. You're broken up. It's too lonely here."

"I'd rather stay here," she replied.

"No. Frazer was saying only the other day that the Plains tribes are in an ugly mood. I'm afraid we're not safe here."

This lie served his purpose, and once she had consented she could not start soon enough. When they closed the house and were about to ride away she wrote on the door—

Gone to Cañon City

The winter set in about the middle of October and proved to be the worst in the history of Colorado. Hundreds of heads of stock froze on the Plains where heretofore thay had thrived and fattened. Trade with the East was cut off by deep snows. Fuel went up a hundred per cent. For months hay and grain sold steadily for from fifteen to twenty cents a pound. Eastern foundries were busy along with the machine-shops in making war material, and but little mining machinery could be manufactured. This shortage made but little difference to Colorado in the spring of '64, for the planting season opened with disastrous rains. Towns were overflowed. Denver was devastated by a great flood. Rivers cut new channels. Ranches and crops disappeared. The Plains were impassable.

Annie insisted they ride down and see what was left of "Mr. Goss' ranch," as she persisted in calling it. To their surprize it had escaped the fury of the high water. But planting was an impossibility. Yet she was strangely perverse, and insisted they stay there a while. Just as it became possible to freight the keenly needed supplies across the Plains, there came a culminating disaster. The Plains Indians smoked for war and commenced destroying trains and attacking stagecoaches. For two months all communication with the river was cut off.

When the black news of the general red uprising reached the ranch, young Ellis rebelled against fate and cried:

"What a country! What a life to be living! You won't agree to my enlisting, but life here is worse than fighting."

She was examining his account book when he began his lament. She closed it softly and said:

"Life isn't pleasant for me, dear. And I can't even fight and forget to be miserable. From what Mr. Frazer said the war must be most over. But there's some fighting left. Go if you want to. As soon as we can we'll go back East. I could have lived out here. After I got used to it I began to like it. If things had been different I'd preferred staying out here. But I won't keep you, Frank."

"I'm sorry, Annie. I didn't mean to make you feel bad. But everything seems so useless. We're good pards, you'n me. There would have been three of us, all good pards. Well, well. Too bad. Sometimes I had the notion you liked him a little, even if you didn't like his ways."

"I like him now, Frank," she whispered, and she rose from the table. "I'd like him now even if he came back a gambler. I've been in poor business to judge him. Good night."

He would have detained her but she flung off his hand and ran to her room.

That night the wind prowled and howled around the ranch house and kept the two awake long into the morning. There was a savage exultation in its cries that made Ellis see the Utes again as they were when he was a prisoner. It was near sunrise when they finally fell asleep, and they slept late.

The girl was the first to hear the soft rapping on the door. Drowsy with sleep she wrapped a blanket around her and went to the window, thinking to see one of the neighbors. A man was limping from the door to a horse.

"Frank! Frank! He's come back! He's come back! Get up! Get up!" she screamed.

Goss turned and called out:

"Hurry up and open up. Your sign on the door says you're in Cañon City, and I rode through there in the night. Don't keep a man waiting whose right leg is scarcely mended."

She did not wait for her brother to hear her cry for she foolishly feared that Goss might ride away. So it was she who opened the door, draped like an Indian girl. As he limped across the threshold she saw his face was thin and lined and much older. Their eyes met in a steady gaze; then he picked her up and was muttering:

"Good little pard! True little pard! Waited for me! Let Frank have his sleep out."

THE END

The Guardsman

By L. Paul

Author of "Handsome Isn't," "Stummicks," etc.

OLD Bill Stevens pushed his canoe in toward the bank at the Stoppin' Place. It was late autumn. He noticed, as the bow grounded, that a fringe of ice lay on the margin of the river though the sun had been up for two hours. Old Bill stepped out, drew the canoe up on the shore and started for Danby's, the only store, indeed the only habitation, in the Stoppin' Place.

Danby himself was lounging at the door and at sight of old Bill he turned toward his barn where his old Indian man-of-all-work squatted idly.

"Hey there, Two Blanket," Danby called. "Spade up some earth and bank the store. Old Bill's here on his last trip, and winter ain't far behind him, certain sure."

Two Blanket, whose ancestors had got through countless northern Quebec winters without undue labor, grunted, rose and got to work.

Old Bill Stevens was the local weather prophet. And when he made his last trip down from the portage to get his winter supplies, Danby always figured the freeze-up as coming close behind.

Old Bill came up to the store building, a rough structure of logs.

"What's new?" he asked. He had been up at his cabin in the woods for three months with never the sight of another man.

"Got company," Danby told him.

"Do tell! What sort?" the old man asked.

"I ain't pestered him," Danby told him. "I don't get curious with strangers till I got 'em sized up. 'Member once up near Dawson before I come East I was settin' in a saloon when a guy come in, and after he'd bought a drink all round for the nine o' us that was there, he up and asks, 'Where be you-all from?' "

Danby paused for effect. Old Bill fidgeted a moment but knew better than to prompt him.

"Well, sir," Danby concluded, "after they'd picked that there curious guy up they found eight bullet holes through him. The ninth sour-dough had a grudge ag'in' the bartender an' took his chance to work it off. Since which day I don't ask fool questions."

"And where did they come from, chum?" a voice asked from behind him.

Old Bill peeped into the door of the store and saw a big man squatted on a bench before the stove.

"Where did them blighters all come from?" asked the big man pleasantly.

"Huh?" Danby turned. "You feelin' better? When a man can make jokes like that he ain't as bad as you looked when you come stumblin' off the trail from end o' steel."

Old Bill nudged him.

"He ain't jokin'. He means it, that there fool question. Reckon the p'int of your annegote don't percolate through his head," he whispered.

Then he raised his voice.

"He don't look like the shootin' kind, Danby. Anyways I'm a curious fool an' was born with questions on me lips."

HE STEPPED inside the store and thrust out his hand.

"I'm Bill Stevens," he announced. "Shake, stranger."

"Name o' Hawkins—Corp'l Hawkins o' the Guards."

The stranger rose, stood gingerly in his sock feet and shook hands.

Old Bill saw that despite his fatigue his shoulders were well back, his spine was straight, his chin in. He didn't know much about Guards but he liked Hawkins' looks.

Hawkins saw a thin, short, little man with iron-gray hair, twinkling blue eyes and skin like leather; a cocky little man who had the appearance of being able to look after himself anywhere, especially in this new country of forest and stream.

"Corp'l Hawkins of the Guards," Old Bill repeated dubiously.

And his eyes traveled across the littered counter to the wall where hung a lithographed calendar. It depicted several red-clad figures in busbies, grouped around the regimental colors, standing at attention woodenly.

"Guards, hey," he objected. "Them's guards yonder, for it says so underneath. You don't look like no guardsman."

Ex-Corporal Hawkins' face flushed.

"Strike me —— well pink, chum," he complained indignantly. "Is it my blinkin' fault that I got flat feet?"

"You don't expect him to come prancin' in here with his red jacket an' fur hat, do ye, Bill?" Danby laughed. "Reckon he left them behind somewheres. King George ain't going to let no lad lug them expensive garmints into the bush, not if he's got a head on him."

"Mebbe so. Mebbe so." Bill sat down on the bench. "Now, Corp'l Hawkins, we don't use them military titles hereabouts. I'm General Nuisance from the portage and this grinnin' idjit yonder is a field marshal, him owin' the only field hereabouts, but we ain't proud. I answer to the name o' Bill and if ye yell 'Danby,' he'll overcharge ye as intelligent as he can. As for ye, we'll forget the corp'l part, and since we don't take without givin' in return, hereafter ye'll be known as Flatfoot Hawkins. And now, if ye'll give us line and verse, where ye come from, and why——"

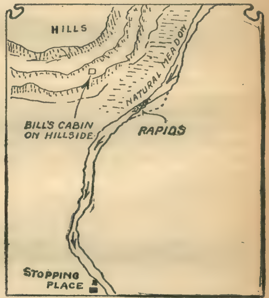
"That I will, chum."

Hawkins cuddled his sore feet in his hands and balanced precariously on the bench.

"I'm from Lunnon, Lunnon in the bloomin' smoke, Lunnon that's half the —— world, the biggest town God ever made. And I come here because I was tired o' it, tired o' crowds, sick o' sleepin' an' eatin' an' livin' with a thousand men, fed up with people!"

"And why did ye pick the Stoppin' Place?" asked Danby.

"I got off the train at the end of the line, chum. I saw a road, and, says I, this here road goes somewheres else and there can't be no worse place than here, says I, so I started marchin'. 'Twas a sizable bit I come, and never a soul I met. I slep' out under a tree, chum. And this morning I come out of the bush, and here I am."



"Do tell!" Old Bill ejaculated. "Ye saw a road, and ye come—simple like that. And what do ye expect to do now, Flatfoot Hawkins?"

"I shall apply for a situation, chum," the late corporal of the Guards announced simply. "I am willing and strong and used to knockin' about, and——"

"Now do ye get that, Danby?" Bill interrupted. "He'll apply for a situation, will Mister Flatfoot Hawkins, an' since there's one citizen to every thousand square mile o' this thrivin' distric' he won't have no trouble pickin' an' choosin'." He eyed the big man pityingly. "Flatfoot, this here ain't London."

"I—I have seen that much," Hawkins agreed.

"Not that the Stoppin' Place ain't a sizable burg at that," Bill went on. "There's a couple of barns behind the trees that ye ain't seen yet, but right here in this room ye have before ye the entire population o' the Stoppin' Place an' its only suburb, the portage, 'cept for that wuthless Injin, Two Blanket."

"If I can't get no situation to suit," Flatfoot told them simply, "I shall —— well settle on the land here and do what I can."

"Ye would!" Bill turned to Danby. "Now what's to be done with this here infant. He ups and leaves London, an' never stops till he lands here. And why? 'Cause he's got a touch o' the thing that druv' us here. 'Cause he seen a road goin' somewhere, an' follered it. 'Cause when that there road turned into a bush trail he just come the faster.

"He don't know it, does Flatfoot, but he's got the heart of a pioneer. That's what ails him. And if he don't know enough to come in out of the rain, why 'tis up to us to help him, Danby. Me, I'll hire ye, Flatfoot, and if ye have the stuff, it'll show before spring."

"And I'll stake ye to an outfit," the practical Danby promised." Them bloke clothes ain't proper for the bush."

"Thanks, chum," Flatfoot said. "I don't want no charity. Mister Bill here can stop the price out of my screw, that is, if I'm worth more than prog."

He bent to draw on his boots.

"Now, Mister Bill, Corp'l—beg pardon—Flatfoot Hawkins reports for duty."

"The first thing is to set easy and hearken to me."

Old Bill grinned. He was beginning to like his hired man.

"Bein' fair minded I got to warn ye. I've my faults, lots o' them. In the first place a city man I guided, claimed I uster lick my knife before helpin' myself to butter. Course that won't hurt, for we'll see no butter this winter. Then I'm a mite pertickler about keepin' clean. Had to fire the last man I holed up with 'cause he wouldn't wash his face Saturdays. Course I don't hold with no continuous—now—ablutions, but once a week's not too frequent ——"

"Strike me —— well pink, Mister Bill. I been in the Guards, and when it wasn't washing it was spit and polish till I was fair sick of it," Flatfoot broke in.

"Ye have the look of a man that done your share o' such," Bill calmed him, "and ye won't find me onreasonable. But there's more comin'. I ain't fussy about some things but I aim to keep my own toothbrush strictly private. Mighty handy them little things is for cleanin' a gun-breech. Had a feller once that kep' lookin' longingly at my toothbrush. One day I cotched him, cotched him cold, and what do ye think he was doing with my toothbrush an' the gun oil?"

"I—I can't say, Mister Bill."

"He was brushin' an slickin' his moustache with it."

Old Bill rose.

"Well, aside from them queer streaks in me I'm easy to get along with. And now, Danby, you throw my stuff together right prompt. It's fifteen mile o' paddlin' an' polin' to my cabin, Flatfoot, an ye can devote the time to one thing ye must learn. Don't tack any mister onto me. I answer to plain Bill. When a man's labeled 'Mister' hereabouts it means he's a tenderfoot."

THE trip up Swift River demonstrated one fact. Ex-Corporal Hawkins of the Guards was no canoeist. Not that he wasn't willing, but after the first experiment old Bill gruffly told him to ride passenger.

"He's good for something," the old man pondered, staring at Hawkins' broad shoulders ahead of him. "Stands to reason every man's got the power to do something proper. But canoes and him don't agree, not in November, anyways."

They reached old Bill's cabin late that night. Together they carried the supplies up the slope from the river.

The cabin was a peeled log structure, well-built, weather proof, big enough for two men, but no bigger. Below it the land sloped downward, a hundred yards of natural meadow, to the brawling rapids that made the portage necessary, gave it its name. Above, the hill was pine-clad and more abrupt, a barrier against the north wind.

Inside were two bunks, a small stove, rude benches, hand-hewn, plank table and old Bill's trapping outfit. He ushered ex-Corporal Hawkins in proudly.

"Reckon ye won't find no better shack this side o' Montreal," he boasted. "Course I don't know for sure. Me, I ain't no traveler. When I get so far south that I see a dozen folks at once I get skeered of the crowds and come back home."

"Tidy bit of all right," Flatfoot agreed. "And now what's the job?"

And he threw off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and waited for orders.

"Take that there hand ax and chop me a bit o' kindlin'," Old Bill suggested. "Me, I'll rustle grub right off."

"Righto."

Hawkins grabbed the small ax and went outside.

"Even if he can't do no more for the present than chop wood and lug water," decided old Bill. "Even if this here pioneer I've hired don't do no more than such chores, he's worth his keep. For he'll be dumned interestin', will Flatfoot, and he's got guts, too."

He paused, for Flatfoot was returning. The big man was cuddling one hand in the other. Blood dripped to the floor.

"Ax bit ye?"

Old Bill scowled, then examined his hired man's hand.

"Well, there ain't no harm done, but ye'd better leave them dangerous-edged tools alone for a bit. I see that choppin' ain't one o' the things ye do best, Flatfoot."

The cut was, luckily, superficial. Old Bill bound it up.

"Wait a bit, chum, and I'll get that there wood."

Hawkins made for the door again.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," Bill grinned as he stopped the other. "Ye are a daring cuss but ye are lucky to have your toes with you still. Them axes like nothin' better than loppin' off little things like toes. You set there and rest."

He went out. In a moment he was back, his arms filled with wood.

"There's a trick to it, Flatfoot," he remarked kindly.

"You're a bloomin' magician," Hawkins conceded.

Old Bill smiled modestly and set about getting supper.

When they had eaten; when, pipes ligthed, they pushed their benches back from the table, old Bill Stevens unfolded his philosophy.

"Reckon ye wonder why I hired ye?" he remarked.

"That I do," Hawkins answered morosely. "For I see now a man needs to know a bit up here."

"Well, since ye ain't conceited, I'll tell ye, the answer being, 'dumned if I know.' "

Old Bill paused to arrange his thoughts.

"I seen ye at Danby's an' I liked ye an' I hired ye, which being done and final till the break-up next spring, we got to find out what ye are good for. Dumned if ye ain't good for somethin'. But it ain't canoeing and it ain't wood-cutting, and so from now on forever more we'll sort of try ye out, Flatfoot, with one thing and another. First and foremost, what did ye do in them Guards? And before ye answer make up your mind not to boast none. Lots o' folks talk pretty at the end of steel and act foolish in the bush. I mind one sport claimed to be the best paddler ever stepped into a canoe, and he dumped me in still water five minutes after we pushed off.

" 'Nother tongue merchant swore 'twas his habit to shoot a lion or a grizzley before breakfast just to keep his hand in, and not a hundred yard from the Stoppin' Place he shot my hat off'n my head, attemptin' to massacree one o' Danby's chickens. He figured on pa'tridge for supper, he did, but he got language mostly, for I was riled. So when ye answer speak careful, Flatfoot, for this is the —— of a country to call a man's bluff. Now what did ye do in them Guards besides wear a red coat and a fur hat?"

Flatfoot tried to select some worthy activity out of his military past, something that would impress his employer.

"I—I mounted guard at Buckin'm Palace," he replied at last.

"Can ye put it clearer like?" Old Bill begged. "Me, I'm a poor, ignorant bushman, and aside from them red-coated, fur-hatted lads in the picture back to the Stoppin' Place, I know no more of guards than ye do of canoes."

"It's like this, chum," Flatfoot explained. "I'm walking my beat as you might say, and His Gracious Majesty comes a-riding past. And I present arms, so——"

And he grabbed Hill's shotgun to demonstrate.

"Go as far as ye like. It ain't loaded," Bill remarked. "And was that there monkey-on-a-stick business all ye did?"

"No, chum," ex-Corporal Hawkins assured him. "When his Gracious Majesty, God bless him, come a-riding back I presented arms again."

"Ye did?" Old Bill sought vainly in this hectic guardsman life for some sign of sense. "And doubtless George was gratified."

"O' course that was when I was a private," Corporal Hawkins went on. "And in them days I done kitchen fatigue, too."

"Say no more, Flatfoot, say no more. I see somethin'."

Old Bill jumped up and grabbed a dirty, dog-eared paper book.

"If ye done kitchen fatigue ye must be able to cook, and if so be ye can throw grub together proper, there's hope for this outfit yet. But since I don't take no man's word for what he can do ye must show me first. Can ye bake a cake?"

"I'm no great hand at it," Flatfoot told him modestly

" 'Tis simple if ye are a real cook and hard if ye are not."

Bill flipped the cookbook open.

"Course we got no butter, but there's lard. And I ain't much on sweet stuff either, but makin' a cake is as good a test as anything. I'll keep the stove going good and that there box oven'll cook her right. Throw her together, and if anything's missing that's printed down here put in somethin' else. That's what a good bush cook has to learn to do, else his customers'd starve."

"Righto."

Flatfoot rose and commenced operations by reading the recipe. Then he paused doubtfully.

"This here calls for eggs," he complained.

"Put in lots o' baking powder," Bill commanded. "And don't hint that ye are a daylight cook and must wait till tomorrow, for I aims to drop asleep tonight feelin' joyful because I've hired me a bang-up cook. Start things moving now. Me, I'll hot up the oven for ye."

Twenty minutes later Flatfoot had finished his batter. It filled to the brim the tin pan he had used. It was chalky-white, and it certainly looked as much like an embryonic cake as like anything else. Old Bill came over to the table to examine it.

"Tarnation," he remarked. "It's to be hoped she's done rising. Cake is cake, but if she swells more, there'll be a winter's supply o't. Not that I can't ——"

He stopped suddenly. For as he spoke, his pipe, dangling from between his half-opened lips, slipped. Striking the edge of the pan, it spread a film of ash over the fair white surface of the cake.

"Shucks," old Bill remarked. "Least said, soonest mended. 'Tis a bit soiled, that cake, Flatfoot. You chuck in a bit o' cocoa an stir it round. It won't show them ashes then. Besides I always did like a chocklit cake. There's tricks to woods cooking, as ye may observe."

Flatfoot obeyed. Then he stuck the cake into the oven, a sickly, brown mess it was by then, too.

"And to think of me wonderin' what ye was good for."

Old Bill filled in the time required for baking the cake with a sort of monologue:

"Wonderin' and puzzlin' why ye was let loose upon us. And all the time ye are a cook! Never saw nobody throw a cake together quicker. No, sir; never did."

"I—I just follered the bloomin' book." Hawkins wasn't looking for praise. "Besides, it isn't cooked yet, chum."

"Give her time, give her time," Bill replied.

Half an hour later they drew the pan out of the oven. The cake seemed to have shrunk.

"That's the chocklit," Bill diagnosed the case. "It'll be one o' those heavy solid cakes they make round Christmas time. Wish I'd thought to have ye stick a few raisins into her. Dump her on the table upside down and shake her free of the pan."

Hawkins obeyed. The pan fell solidly on the rough table. But nothing happened. The cake remained stuck tight.

"Hand me that skinnin' knife," Bill ordered, flopping the pan over.

Hawkins handed him the keen blade. He thrust it boldly into the mysteries of that cake, or tried to. But it skidded on the surface and slid over the tin side of the pan. Bill shook his head.

"Gimme the ax," he commanded gruffly.

He drove the blade of the ax at the cake. It sunk a bare half inch. When he sought to lift it for a second blow, the cake and pan came with it. Old Bill let the ax fall again. Then turned to Flatfoot Hawkins.

"You go make three notches on that there bunk post," he directed .

Mystified, his new hired man obeyed.

"One to remind ye that ye can't paddle a canoe," Old Bill explained patiently as

Hawkins cut into the post. "One to indicate ye can't chop wood and a grand deep one to say ye are no cook. And every time I find out somethin' ye can't do, ye'll cut another notch. I heard o' these princes and dooks that sleep in their richly carved beds," concluded old Bill Stevens. "But come springtime they won't have nothing on me."

FOR two weeks no further notches were cut in that bunk-post. Old Bill contented himself with studying his hired man in such spare time as he had. And spare time was scant, for snow was overdue, ice was beginning to shove out its tiny needles from the banks of Swift River, and the time was at hand when he must set out his traps.

He found Flatfoot a willing worker. The big man could at least fetch and carry for him. And there was no doubt that, aside from his general inefficiency, ex-Corporal Hawkins was a pleasant enough companion.

But with the first deep snow Bill decided to make another effort. He rummaged in the pole-floored loft under the cabin's roof and produced snow shoes. Danby had outfitted the big guardsman completely, and now, clad in mackinaw and moccasins, he came out to learn the difficult art of the webbed shoe.

Five minutes later old Bill desisted.

"Ye can go and cut another notch, Flatfoot," he declared disgustedly .

"Strike me —— well pink, chum" Flatfoot protested. "Is it my blamed fault? How the —— can I tell which foot I'm standing on the other with, and both of them under the snow?"

"Take them off and cut that notch."

Old Bill stared gloomily down the slope of the natural meadow. Then had an inspiration.

"Why not?" he thought. "There's a lot in common between this here tenderfoot and that thick-headed Swede timber cruiser what give me the danged things."

And at once went to rummage anew in the loft. This time he drew out a pair of skis, long, polished, wooden blades with strong harness.

"Shuck them moccasins and slip on boots," he commanded.

And more or less patiently Flatfoot obeyed. But he was beginning to have suspicions.

"I trust you are not making game of me," he voiced his doubts as old Bill bent to adjust the ski harness for him. "I'm signed on for duration, I am, and I'll stick but if you spoof me, chum, I will take it out of your hide come spring."

"Ye are suspicious," Old Bill grinned.

"Now what do I do with these —— bed-slats?" asked Flatfoot.

"Ye travel!"

Bill rose and slipped behind him. He pushed hard, and Flatfoot, slipping over the crest of the slope, legs locked rigid, his tall body balanced precariously, started down the slope towards the open river with all the speed a well polished pair of skis could yield.

"I say—I say—How do I stop these blinkin' things," he called as he swayed and slipped down the slope.

"Fall, durn ye." Old Bill made for the cabin unconcernedly. "And afterwards see ye climb back up here with them still on to ye."

A shower of snow told him he had been obeyed. Flatfoot had fallen. He watched from the threshold till the big guardsman had struggled to his feet again, right at the river's edge. He grinned as he eyed the long slope its snowy surface marred only by the single ski track. Then he went into the cabin.

"He'll be hungry when he gets up here," concluded Bill. "But I'm gamblin' he's got the guts to push them skis over the top if it takes all night. Can't cut no more notches in yonder bunk-post or I'll be fallin' to the floor one o' these nights."

Two hours later he opened the door and looked out. The hillside was criss-crossed with ski tracks. Here and there huge hollows in the snow loomed up like buffalo wallows.

Halfway up the slope Flatfoot was patiently making his twentieth attempt. He was edging sidewise, and even as old Bill watched, he slipped the back of one ski over the other, put his weight on it.

"He learns slow and British," Bill decided. "But ain't he the persistent cuss?"

The ski slipped. Flatfoot, waving his arms wildly, shot backward down the slope to a staggering fall.

"Take them toys off and come home," Bill cried.

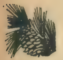
"Like —— I will." Flatfoot sat up. "I'll walk these —— bed-slats over the top of this hill if it takes till spring to do it."

"I'm beginning to like that cuss," Old Bill thought as he started towards the stove.

"I know I like the cuss," he decided an hour later when he heard the *slip-slip* of skis outside the door.

Flatfoot Hawkins stood there, snow from head to foot.

"There's a trick to it, I'd say," he crowed, triumphantly. "And s'welp me, chum, I've got it!"



FROM that night Flatfoot stuck to the skis. He acquired none of the graceful accomplishments of the art; knew nothing of Telemark or Christiana Swing, and when he wanted to stop he sat down. But he learned enough to make winter travel possible. And so, when two weeks passed with no further notches on the bunkpost, old Bill decided to try him with something else.

"Feel a mite tired," he complained craftily one afternoon. "Ye'd best slip down river and look over them traps. Put on the Swede Seven League Boots and be careful the rampagin' squirrels don't get a free feed off ye. And mind that a skin with holes beat in—it don't bring in the money. Kill a trapped animal gently for it's worth money."

"Righto," agreed Flatfoot cheerily.

"I hope 'tis a prophecy, that," Bill replied. "For hitherto when ye say 'righto' ye mean 'wrongo.'"

Then he watched as the big man slid off down the slope towards the river.

"Make a trapper of him yet," Bill thought. "He handles them skis better every day. Me, I wouldn't trust myself on them things if I was paid for it."

Then he settled down to wait.

In an hour Flatfoot Hawkins was back, empty handed.

"Nothin' stirrin?" Bill asked.

Hawkins seemed elated.

"Nothing but trouble, chum. Do you know what I found in that third trap? I found trouble."

"Unless it was a elephant or a tiger, which same ain't strictly native, I'd presume ye'd have brought it back dead." Bill complained. "Animals hereabouts may trap themselves, but they don't deliver their dead bodies at the door. They got to be lugged."

"Prime luck I didn't lug this one." Hawkins grinned happily for he felt that at last he was earning his keep.

"Many's the lad I've seen in trouble for cotching them little —— of foxes back home, with the Master of the Hunt and all the gentry in the county down on him. No, chum, 'tis dangerous to kill a fox."

"A fox—a fox, ye big idiot. Ye didn't—ye wouldn't ——"

"Yes, a fox. I let him go. Here he was in the trap and, says I, nobody's seen him for there's no tracks about—and that was woodscraft, chum, me rememberin' to look for ski marks—here's this fox, and if any one finds out, Bill'll cotch ——. So I let him go."

"Ye let him go. Ye let him go," Bill repeated, his anger rising. "A fox, and ye turned him loose."

"Now you needn't let your dander get up," Flatfoot soothed him. "This wasn't even a proper looking fox, anyway. Off color it was ——"

"Off color—off color!"

Bill came closer and shook his fist under the big man's nose.

"What do you mean by off color?"

"It was a sort of black, and old too, for I seen white hairs on it ——"

Flatfoot was prepared to describe the fox completely, but old Bill had stopped listening. He had grabbed the hand ax.

"Sort of off color," screamed old Bill. "With silver hairs amongst the gold, like."

Chop-chop-chop, as he attacked the bunkpost.

"And 'I saved ye trouble!' says Mister Flatfoot Hawkins, 'for I let him go!'"

Chop-chop-chop.

"'It was only a silver fox,' thinks Mister Corporal Hawkins, and what'd we do with the thousand dollars it'd bring?"

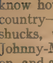
Chop-chop-chop.

"Cuttin' that bunk-post down don't do no good," Flatfoot protested.

"It's the post or your head."

Old Bill stopped for a minute. Then his anger left him as suddenly as it had come. After all it was his fault letting this greenhorn loose on the trap-line.

"Reckon it don't do no good," he admitted glumly. "But see here, Flatfoot, you stick close by the cabin after this. Amusin' you are in small doses, but I can't afford to have ye doing kind deeds to my animals. That there fox ye set free is probably laughin' at ye right now. Oh yes, I know how they treats them foxes in your country—a lord I guided once told me. But shucks, what's the use. You'll be little Johnny-Mind-the-Fire for a bit from now on, and any time you get conceited, you go count the notches in yonder bunk-post."



IT WAS a week later that the bull moose came plowing through the heavy snow toward the cabin. He was a rangy brute, new to that district, unused to man, for he came from the barrens to the North. And through thick falling snow he did not see the cabin till he stood half way up the open meadow right where the wind had piled the snow deepest.

Hawkins spotted him and called Old Bill. The great brute was standing stock still, his back level with the snow, head up and nose working.

Old Bill was in good humor. His traps had yielded another fox the day before and this time it had not got away.

"No use wasting ca'tridges on him. He's snowbound," he remarked as he slipped on his snowshoes. "Over five foot o' soft snow where he is, and I aim to keep him there," he continued.

"You aren't going to tackle him with that knife?" Hawkins asked incredulously.

"Seein' that my teeth is dull, I reckon I got to." Bill started down the slope. "Besides, if I bit him he might get peevish. I've known 'em to, Flatfoot."

At his coming, the moose turned and tried to flounder back toward the river. But Old Bill headed him off. On snowshoes he could easily outstrip the huge floundering animal.

The moose turned again toward the cabin, making slow progress of it as he plowed through the deep snow. Old Bill went round him again. He was trying to get in position for what he had in mind, a swift stab of the long keen knife at the great beast's throat. On any other footing it would have been impossible. Even here there was the chance that the moose might break for firmer going and make it.

The bull seemed to read his purpose and swung down-river, keeping, however, to the deep snow of midslope. Old Bill turned with him, running along beside him, waiting his chance. Had he been alone he would have ended the business then and there, if indeed he had ever started this hippodroming, but from the corner of his eye he could see Flatfoot goggling on the hilltop, as appreciative an audience as any old white-headed show-off could ever hope for. He'd show the greenhorn a bit of woodscraft he'd remember, would Old Bill Stevens.

So he kept pace with the wallowing, frantic animal and herded it along with loud cries until they were near the edge of the pines. Then, and then only, with the artist's nice instinct for the proper climax, Old Bill put on speed, came up along the heaving back of the animal and bent to drive home his knife.

It was at this moment that his left snowshoe came off.

He fell. The moose, as if sensing what had happened, as if realizing that this pursuer was now at his mercy, stopped, then turned. Old Bill, fumbling frantically, could not get that webbed shoe on again. And as he gripped the half-frozen thongs of the harness his knife slipped from his grasp. He was as helpless with the one snowshoe as a one-legged man on skates. Worst of all, the big moose seemed to know it.

He came slowly, deliberately toward Bill Stevens. Bill could see his great eyes fixed on him, could almost read the purpose in them.

He was not, however, the kind to give up easily. Walking, let alone running, was impossible in that deep snow. But he could roll, and like a great snowball Bill Stevens started down hill toward the river. And the moose, as if playing some game, kept pace with him.

Up on the hilltop Flatfoot Hawkins, ex-corporal of the Guards, to whom a moose was a new and terrifying animal, turned and dived for the cabin. When he came out again, Old Bill was near the bottom of the slope, and the moose, angling round him, and found firmer footing. Old Bill, tired by his strenuous progress, sought to slither away as the bull edged closer to him. But he knew that he was done except for a miracle; knew that the big bull overcoming his last doubts and fears was about to strike.

The huge brute came closer, rose on his hind legs. His huge bulk towered over Old Bill. His forelegs working like pistons, struck at the trapper, prone there on the snow.

By a supreme effort Bill Stevens clawed out of reach. The moose bounded forward, rose again, and again those sharp hoofs struck.

And then, *crack—crack—crack*. Old Bill Stevens wondered why they had rifles in Heaven, wondered what that sticky hot stuff was that first dripped, then spurted over him; wondered as the great bulk and its black shadow on the snow slipped slowly sidewise and disappeared.

Then, crouching there in the snow, Bill Stevens saw. The bull lay in the snow beside him, thrashing out his life. Over its heart was a bullet hole.

Bill staggered to his feet. He had lost his second snowshoe during this frantic progress down grade. He stood there, hip deep.

Up on the crest of the hill, at the edge of the hard-trodden snow around the cabin, lay ex-Corporal Hawkins of the Guards, his body at an angle to the line of fire, his elbows firmly planted in the snow, legs outspread, a smoking rifle in his hands. Had Old Bill been a military expert he would have known this for the prone position in musketry. And he would have admitted that, like everything else military, a guardsman did it well.

He turned to the moose. It was dead already.

"Lucky shot," he concluded. "And lucky Bill Stevens! One o' them other bullets might just as well ha' winged me."

And he bent to examine the wound. Then he whistled. For the bullet hole resembled a three-leaf clover.

"Three hits at two hundred yards." He shook his head. "Who'd ha' thought it."

Then started up the slope.

Ex-Corporal Hawkins was methodically cleaning the rifle when he entered the cabin.

"Where the dad-burned —— did you learn to shoot like that?" asked Old Bill a trifle pettishly in spite of his gratitude.

"In the Guards," Flatfoot told him. "You see, chum, when things gets a bit hot anywheres they sends out the Guards to mop up."

"Will you talk sense, pardner?" Old Bill requested humbly. "Will you take pity on an old bushman that finds he don't know nothing after all? Will you say simple what you was and what you shot in them Guards?"

"I was a sniper," replied Flatfoot Hawkins, squinting down the rifle barrel. "And sometimes I shot at targets, but mostly I shot at men."

"Do tell," whispered Old Bill Stevens weakly.

A WORK OF ART

by Earl H. Emmons

YOU can have your foreign artists, with their temperament and such,
But these soul interpretations don't get me excited much;
Though I give them fellers credit for the way they play their part,
Still a makin' scenes and statues ain't the only form of art.

I contend it doesn't matter what a feller's job may be,
If he's got the thing perfected to a really high degree
And he's far above the average in his craft, why then I say
He's an artist just as much as them as works with paint and clay.

As a bright and fair example of an artist like I mean,
I would place in nomination Sheriff Jackson J. McKeene.
There's a man that made a record for the ages, I opine,
And you'll never find his equal in his own respective line.

He was not exactly cultured, but he had an honest heart,
And the way he done his work was simply nothin' less than art;
He was good in all the branches; he could ride and trail and shoot.
But the times he showed his genius was at hangin' some galoot.

Like a pearl from out an oyster what was raised in mud and slime,
He would take a common hangin' and he'd make the thing sooblime.
And I claim the same was art, with all the handicaps he had,
For at times his raw materials was pretty blasted bad.

Take the case of Buzzard Kelly who was stretched for rustlin' steers;
Why you'd never see a sweeter job in seven hundred years.
As a work with style and finish it was really rerkyshay,
And I recollect it just as plain as if it was today.

There was first a rangy rostrum on a shady stretch of ground;
And a center dinin' table with some small ones herded 'round;
And the socially eleete from near and far was gathered there
For to cheer the Buzzard's journey when he clumb the Golden Stair.

And the tables they was loaded with a fodder fit for kings;
Such as pie and puddin', cake and fruit and all them tasty things.
While a juicy yearlin' steer was kept a roastin' on the coals,
Which the same had been a member of the herd that Kelly stole.

At the center set some deputies and Sheriff Jack McKeene,
With the honored guest of honor, Mister Kelly, in between;
All partakin' of refreshments in a manner blithe and gay,
While a band of seven pieces tooted joyfully away.

And the only thing you'd notice, that would maybe strike you queer,
Was a rope that looped the Buzzard's neck and knotted by his ear,
While the other end was fastened to an overhangin' limb
That pertruded from a shady tree direct in back of him.

And the rope around his guzzle had been padded soft and wide,
So the thing would not annoy him none or scratch his tender hide;
Then a roomy pit was shoveled out beneath the Buzzard's chair,
But the hole was covered with a trap so no one knowed it's there.

They was kegs of flowin' liquor for to give the party zest
And a many merry toast was drunk unto the honored guest;
Then a puncher sung some ditties with the music soft and low,
And the parson got aboard a keg and said a prayer or so.

Then the Buzzard made a speech and took occasion to declare
How entranced he was to be the guest at such a swell affair.
It was quite the greatest show he'd been invited to in years,
And he said he wouldn't missed it for a half a hundred steers.

He declared the sheriff's thoughtfulness he never would forget,
Said McKeene was sure the finest man that he had ever met,
And the only thing that saddened him about the party was
That he didn't have a dozen lives to give in such a cause.

Then the sheriff thanked the speaker and he said the blasted town
Sure was honored for to honor such a rustler of renown,
Then he bowed to Kelly while the crowd began to cheer and clap,
And when Kelly rose to bow in turn the sheriff yanked the trap.

And the Buzzard left the party through the hole beneath the floor,
And the trap swung back and everything was peaceful as before.
Then the band it played "The Endin' of a Blasted Perfect Day,"
As we drunk to our departed guest who had been called away.

And when Kelly finished kickin' and the rope was straight and still,
Then we pulled him out and planted him on Cemetery Hill.
And the band it broke into the tune of "Hot Old Times Tonight,"
As it led the way to Casey's bar, the Buckaroo's Delight.

And I claim it's art to hang a man in such a pleasant way,
Leavin' him and everybody pleased, the which is why I say
That the Hall of Fame ain't finished till it honors Jack McKeene
As the greatest hangin' artist that the world has ever seen.

King of the Beachcombers

A Complete Novelette

By Frederick Moore

Author of "God of the Sakoi," "The Secret of the Timor Lout," etc.

"THE eggs that the old Malay woman's sellin' you these days is somethin' brutal on bein' rotten," remarked "Port Light" Johnson as he got down on his knees to blow the coconut-coir fire over which he was cooking breakfast among the rocks on the beach.

Having only one eye, and that the left, he had long been known as "Port Light" to the sailors and beachcombers from Sydney to Vigan.

"Thursday" Smith was sitting in the edge jungle and much concerned with mending his old dungaree trousers.

"You cook them eggs and keep your trap shut," he remarked pleasantly, holding up what was left of his trousers and scanning them critically in an attempt to decide whether the contemplated patch should go on with a bias which would simplify subsequent sewing.

Port Light turned and trained his marble-white dead eye on Thursday; the other eye was squinted from the smoke.

"Don't you try to lord it over me, Thursday, just because it's my turn at bein' cook. Fix your breeches if you like, but mind what I'm tellin' you of—the eggs is bad. That Malay woman's chickens is stayin' out nights and layin' eggs in the jungle. Them's what she sells to us—and keeps the fresh ones for the swells at the Kota Balun Hotel. Me, I ain't goin' to eat dud eggs!"

He swung to the fire again, taking care of his bare knees as he got down in the sand. His trousers of dirty canvas were cut off at the knees, and he wore shoes with elastic tops that curled down over his sockless ankles, giving him something of the appearance of a wood-sprite, or the fairy shoemaker that is always pictured in books of fanciful people for children

His old gingham shirt still had the vague traces of a red pattern running through the faded fabric. His bare head had a yellowish thatch of hair that curled in ringlets about his ears and neck. His blue eye and his white one looked most startling in their setting of sun-browned skin.

"Then go down to the Kota Balun and eat on the restaurant veranda, and have native flunkeys to hand your grub to you," said Thursday. "You don't cook them eggs right—you boil 'em too long to have 'em soft, and not long enough to have 'em hard. That makes 'em sticky."

He looked out over the rosy sea and the salmon sky, for the sun was well up, and the morning too lovely to bother about sewing patches on trousers. He set aside his needle and cord and put the trousers on—tomorrow would be time enough to worry about patches.

Thursday Smith was a big-framed man, burned red instead of black by the sun. His face was covered with a reddish beard that had a way of growing naturally into a peak on his chin. This gave him a look of distinction in spite of his old dungaree trousers. His bare feet were soled with pads of canvas that were tied across the insteps with bits of leather. His wrinkled old pilot cap had probably once adorned the head of some steamship mate. Before Thursday salvaged it from the sea, the cap had floated some thousands of miles in the Pacific. The rusty top that had once been white had absorbed perspiration from Thursday's overlong hair. But he wore that cap with a jaunty tilt over an ear. Just as his rough and untrimmed beard suggested an unkempt medical man, the battered framework of the old cap gave Thursday an air of command.

He carried his chin forward, and there was something in his steady gray eyes that was pleasantly aggressive—and mildly challenged whoever met them. It was quite within possibility that if Thursday Smith had chosen to do so, he might be in a position of command. He had undoubtedly controlled something before he had turned beachcomber.

On the score of what Thursday had been, his companions had long since let their curiosity die out—mate of a liner, or skipper of a schooner, they had never decided to their own satisfaction. He had been something in ships, that was plain enough—he had the seaman's eye for all rigs. But he had never taken his friends into his confidence, and they had never worked themselves up to the bold point of asking for information.

It is not good form to ask friends in the South Seas who are on the beach what they were before they came, where they hailed from, and what they intend to do next. When beachcombers tell of themselves of their own accord they are generally lying. So nobody found fault because he called himself Thursday Smith, his name being neither Thursday nor Smith. The Thursday part of it came from his having joined fortunes with Port Light Johnson at Thursday Island. At that time neither of them had any fortune, and little prospect of having one either jointly or singly in the future.

Both men were chronic beachcombers. They were most successful at the profession. There were few islands of the South Pacific they had not combed, and now they had invaded Malaysia. They avoided everything in the form of honest work, though they always managed to pretend to be making a fairly good go at trepang fishing. And the board on which Port Light was laying out breakfast for six persons was fitted with eating utensils not to be expected from beachcombers—silver egg-cups, silver spoons, silver-topped glass saltshakers, a silver coffee-pot, and delicate chinaware cups with blue bands.

All these things were marked "Kota Balun," which was the name of the Dutch hotel at Port Retzenborg, a half a mile or so around the bend of the point of rocks in which Port Light was doing his cooking.

Thursday stood up and scanned the smooth sea thoughtfully, as if he might find something on its surface which would be of vital importance. He yawned comfortably, looked back toward the rim of jungle, and walked down to where Port Light was boiling the eggs in tin cans.

There was a great barrier of rock that ran out of the hills of the jungle. That barrier shut off the sea in the direction of Port Retzenborg, and behind the ridge of rocks the cooking was done. It was impossible for any one to come up the beach from the hotel without being observed through the holes in the rocks along the upper ridge. If a man stood beside the rock wall, he could just see to the warehouses and wharf of Port Retzenborg, and make out a corner of the front veranda.

Behind this barrier the beachcombers cooked and ate their meals when the weather was dry and pleasant. With silverware for their meals they did not want anybody to drop in on them unexpectedly. The beaches in both directions assured them of this needed privacy—and no one could come along the jungle trails without being heard. So their outdoor kitchen and dining-room was a flat stretch of sand with rocks ranged around it for seats, one side being formed by the rocky barrier which ran down into the sea and formed a reef that jutted out from the island.

"Hello!" remarked Thursday, as he leaned against the rocky ridge and looked in the direction of the hotel. "The *Palembang's* coming in!"

PORT LIGHT was cracking an egg with all the care to be expected in an experiment of vast importance to scientific progress.

"Sure, I heard her whistle a bit back," he remarked, blowing his fingers to cool them.

Thursday surveyed the squatty little steamer as she drew in for the wharf, her red funnel visible over the top of the warehouse.

"It's getting so a man could set his watch by them Dutch boats," he remarked.

Port Light hurled the egg into the sea. "You and your blasted worryin' on them Dutch boats!" he exclaimed disgustedly. "Your job's to buy eggs—we ain't runnin' no hatchery here, but a eatin' joint!"

"Oh, shut up about the eggs," retorted Thursday without turning around.

"You'll hear from the 'Dude,' if his eggs ain't fresh," warned Port Light. "You know how he is. He looks to us to see his grub is fit to eat."

"Aw, he can go down to the Kota Balun and eat, which we can't," said Thursday. "I'm getting tired of hearing what the Dude has to have—it's Dude this and Dude that. I don't want his swell airs around me. If I hear anything out of him about the eggs I buy, I'll jump the gang. And you close your trap, too. I'm as good as Dude Fenton—and better than you. Belay!"

"You better look out what you say like that—out loud," warned Port Light with a nervous glance back to the jungle. "You got style, I'll admit, or I wouldn't have joined up as chum. And come to the Dude, I ain't so sure you couldn't do as well as him—or mebbe better—at the game he plays with the swells at the Kota Balun Hotel, and——"

"Dry up, Porty!" broke in Thursday.

He was pleasant about it, but he meant what he said. And Port Light knew orders when he heard them. His allegiance was more to Thursday than to Dude Fenton, who bossed the gang. In more than one port, where Fenton had operated and had been suspected or known as the head of a gang of beachcombers, he was known to the police as "King of the Beachcombers." He had a way of drawing about him all the shiftless neer-do-wells, and instructing them in knavery.

"Well, I'm talkin' for your own good—and mine, Thursday," went on Port Light. "Don't git shirty. I'm for you—and if you jump the gang, count me in. I know a good pal when I have one."

"All right, all right," said Thursday irritably. He seemed to have something on his mind that he wanted to consider far more than his relations with Dude Fenton or Port Light, for there was a dreamy look in his eyes as he watched the *Palembang* drawing in to her dock.

It was likely, that as he had given up more of the good things of life than Port Light in order to live the lazy life of a beach vagabond, Thursday was lusting for respectability and companions more suited to his tastes.

"It's them blasted eggs that got my foot into it with you," mourned Port Light presently. "I ain't meanin' to grouse, so if you'll be a bit chummy, I'll——"

Thursday swung round on him.

"I'm sick of this, Porty," he admitted with a queer ferocity in his look and his cautious tones. "You're all right—but the Dude gets on my nerves with his high and mighty ideas. And what have I come to—a rank beacher, mixed up with a murdering cockney, a slick thief like the Dude, and that slimy Phil Jones who's only waiting his chance to double-cross the lot of us with the Dude when things fall their way."

"Yes, I've mistrusted Phil some time," admitted Port Light as he began to put the eggs into the silver cups. He glanced over his shoulder at the jungle again, fearsome now.

"But you keep your gloves on, Thursday my boy, and don't let 'em see the claw you've got. We'll slip our cables, you and me, on the lot."

"Drop it for now," cautioned Thursday, glancing to the jungle himself, suddenly wary, as if he had heard some suspicious sound from the greenery. "The Dude may be listening—and we'd better talk this out when we're sure we're alone."

"Maybe it's the nigger that's listenin' for him," whispered Port Light.

"The nigger's the best of the lot, outside of ourselves," said Thurdsay, drawing close to the other. "The Elephant's honest—he's a vagabond and he doesn't care who knows it—and if I was to lose him and his mandolin—I'd jump out quick in the first dirty trader that'd take me foremast for my passage."

He turned back to the wall of rocks and gave his attention to the *Palembang* once more.

"Look as if she's brought any passengers?" asked Port Light in a loud tone, signaling that he understood that the conversation from now on should be on safe grounds.

"Can't say yet," replied Thursday in kind. "But the *Palembang* generally has good pickings."

"Them eggs is done as much as they're

goin' to be done," said Port Light. From a cairn of rocks he drew out an old oiltin which was banded round its middle with a smear of sticky stuff to keep insects and rock prowlers of various kinds from crawling up the sides of the tin and getting into the food supplies. He lifted off the canvas top and took out rolls, a pot of jam, and a tin of Scotch biscuits from London.

"Coffee up—and hot!" called Port Light to the edge of the jungle. "Come and git it, you swells that sleep while the cook ruins his blasted complexion in the smoke and gits freckles on his neck! Chow—take it or leave it! Me, I'm ready to eat!"

"You-all don't have to call me but one times," came a melodious voice from the jungle. "Them is sweet words, Po't Light! Ah does love mah hen's-aigs!"

Thursday sat down on a convenient rock while Port Light went for the coffee-pot. It was standing on hot sand and the remnants of a second fire in among the rocks.

"Here you are, m'lord," said Port Light as he poured a blue-banded cup full of the brown liquid for Thursday. "Hotel coffee, just as good as if you had it on the veranda of the Kota Balun—and cheaper. When you've got the galley job next, mind what I'm tellin' you of, and let the coffee be made first and then stand on hot ashes—separate fire, I make, from the eggs. The fire that boils the eggs's too hot for the coffee, and the eggs do better cooked last on a quick fire."

"You're a nifty steward's department," complimented Thursday as he sipped the coffee with appreciation. "That's the real stuff, Port Light! I'll never be able to make coffee as well as you do, extra fire or no."

Port Light chuckled and grinned, glad for the compliment. Thursday's sharpness had worried him. "Stick to me, Thursday me boy, and I'll put fat on your ribs. Anybody can make good coffee with the storeroom of the Kota Balun to draw it from—it's rich stuff, I'll say the word."

"Better give that lot of loafers another call," suggested Thursday, as he reached to the board for his silver egg-cup and a spoon. "They'll give an awful growl if they find their grub cold," and he winked at Port Light.

"Rise and shine, mates!" called Port Light loudly to the jungle. "If you don't lay for'ard and put on the old feedbag, you'll find your coffee cold and the cook cross!"

"There's something afoot in that little party," whispered Thursday. "You watch my words—there's crooked work among 'em, and that's why they hang back on us. I'll bet the Dude is lining up the three with him to skip out and leave us flat on our own. Maybe it's the *Palembang* they intend to give us the pier-head jump in. I know—the Dude's been waiting for something to happen that'll give him his chance to leave us in the lurch."

"Mebbe we'd do better to go it alone," whispered Port Light in assent. "Lay off—here comes the Dude!"

There was a rustling sound from the near-by jungle. Then subdued voices. Something twanged musically, and was followed by a mellow good-natured laugh.

A tall white man broke through the wall-like edge of the jungle and stepped out on the sand. He was Dude Fenton, leader of the gang.

II

FENTON walked straight across the sand, carrying a small black box in his hand. He was fairly well dressed in comparison with Thursday and Port Light, having on a suit of old white clothes, complete, though frayed at the edges, stained and dirty.

He had on a white shirt and old low shoes. His garments proclaimed him as a man lacking funds, and apparently without any regular means of making a suitable living.

But one thing marked Fenton apart from the two men at breakfast—his hair was neatly cut. In every other detail he might easily be taken for a man who spent his time loafing with these others who wore long hair and untrimmed beards and seemed to be in the hopeless poverty of unashamed vagabonds.

He was naturally a fastidious man. From that fact had sprung his nickname of "Dude." For in spite of a three-day black beard on his cheeks, he looked neat and clean so far as his person was concerned—clean hands, white teeth, and a face well-rounded and free of deep lines which always mark the beachcomber who lives from hand to mouth on improper food. In fact, it was a jaunty figure which emerged from the jungle into the sunlight of that tropical morning.

Fenton was a young man—probably not more than thirty. His eyes were brown and soft, lacking in the hardness to be expected in a man who managed to live by keen wits and slippery fingers.

But there was a shrewdness in his look, for all his outward softness—a gentle blandness that considered and measured every fact behind eyes which were filled with lazy indifference to everything about him. Dressed in good clothes, Dude Fenton could have passed anywhere as a spoiled son of wealthy parents who regarded the world and its work-a-day people with light contempt.

He wore no hat. But his cheeks were not sun-seared like Port Light and Thursday, who were literally burned. The Dude merely had that deep tan which is acquired by the white man who is accustomed to the tropics.

He strode across the flat sand which floored the inclosed space where the others were sitting at their breakfast. He gave them a nod, remarking—

"Coffee smells good, Port Light."

He passed on to the barrier of rocks, where he put down his black box and stared over the beach in the direction of the hotel.

"*Palembang's* in on time," suggested Thursday.

"So I see," said the Dude, studying the distant vista. "And passengers coming ashore. Good!"

The others stood up and ranged beside him. He moved away from them, pretending to seek a better vantage point. It was a little way he had, this always keeping out of reach of any grouping of his companions.

"Two—four—and that man in the lead—five, I'd say," said Thursday.

"I've counted nine walking up to the Kota Balun," said Fenton. "It looks as if we'll have rich pickings this trip."

"All in white—with sun-helmets," went on Thursday. "That looks as if they're not ordinary trippers—but planters and traders."

Fenton grinned.

"That's what we want—planters and traders. I'd say they intend to wait over three days to catch the down steamer for Balik Papan."

"That's fat for us," said Port Light.

"Yes. It means they'll have plenty of cash," agreed Fenton. "A shift of ships here always means good business for us. We certainly picked a good place when we decided to stay on here—nothing better for what we want than a small port where traders shift boats.

"The tourist crowd comes ashore and leaves the bulk of their cash aboard the steamer in the purser's safe, go back aboard at sailing time, and I'm lucky if I get a watch or two. And little good we get out of watches and jewelry."

As they stood watching the passengers walk up to the Kota Balun, three other figures came from the jungle, walking leisurely, and talking quietly together.

"Toady Harry" was the one a little in the lead—a short and burly figure. He was thick-set of body but not fleshy in the sense of being fat. Rather, his shoulders were heavy and his short legs, revealed by his attenuated trousers, were round.

On closer inspection his trousers were not trousers at all, but pongee silk pajamas belted with a strip of the same material, the bottoms being hacked off. He wore one white shoe and one brown one, both lacking strings, only the top eyelets having a thong tied across them over the insteps.

His bare freckled arms were strongly muscled, and adorned with tattooed figures of ships, flags, snakes, butterflies—all done with the gorgeous coloring and delicate lines which betray the skilled work of Japanese.

The cotton undershirt which lay open in front for lack of buttons, revealed more colored patterns, some of which disappeared along the round of his body under his arms. His hairy chest was a veritable bulwark of flesh and bone, bulging out like the breast of a pouter pigeon.

Toady's head was round, and set low on his shoulders by a short neck. His hair was long and down about his ears, while a fringe of black beard covered his jaws. A tooth was missing in front. His ears were overlarge, and the flesh of them lay in queer bunches, as if they were still in the process of growing and had not yet fallen into their ultimate shapes.

His black eyes had a humorous squint. He carried a bamboo pole, a little longer than necessary for a cane. But it was plain that he did not need this staff for support, for he strode along with light feet, prodding the sand with the pole.

The next was Phil Jones. He was long and gangling, walking with loose joints and a suggestion of daintiness, which was not the result of any desire to walk affectedly, but was due to the fact that he wore heelless slippers of faded red velvet. As the sand had a way of getting into the toes of the slippers, he picked up his feet in a peculiar manner to avoid the sharp particles which otherwise would chafe his soles.

Phil's trousers were strangely new, being of a light seersucker material of light gray. He wore a waistcoat of checked material, dirty and lacking half its buttons and a tailless steward's jacket of blue goods, unbuttoned with brass buttons down the front. These buttons he apparently kept bright by polishing, for they gave him a strangely smart appearance.

He might easily be taken for a ship's steward who had rambled away from the docks for a look round ashore, and had found the vessel gone when he returned. This idea was strengthened by his white canvas sailor's cap, with brim turned up all around. It was cleanly white, having been washed countless times in salt water and allowed to dry in strong sunlight.

Phil's face was thin, and of sallow color. There was a look of sadness in his gray eyes, as if he mourned over some secret wo. His hair was sandy, and though he was not shaven, his beard had little body to it, consisting of a few light and straggling hairs on his jaw and upper lip as if the soil in which they grew was too weak to produce hair of virility.

He was a man who enjoyed bodily ease, but his natural laziness was counterbalanced by a nimble and devious brain. He knew how to plan things that required subtlety and caution. Though the others were not aware of it, Phil Jones and Fenton were in secret alliance. It was Phil who kept Fenton informed of how the others might be handled to best advantage, and how they were inclined to regard him and his project while he was out of their company.

The last of the trio was a big and soft black man, who walked like an animated jelly roll, his shoulders threatening to ooze out of his coat through the seams.

It was a dungaree "jumper" that betrayed engine-room antecedents, being oily about the side pockets, in which some former wearer had kept a supply of wiping-waste. It was a tremendous garment, washed clean except for the oil stains. It flopped loosely about the mountainous bulk of body which gave to the black man his sobriquet of "Elephant Joe."

Below the jacket he wore a pair of loose and voluminous trousers made from that rough and porous material known as crash. The trousers were a surprizingly good fit, and the mystery of the excellent tailoring for a man beyond all reason in size was due to the fact that Elephant Joe had made the trousers himself. When it was known that the toweling used in the kitchen of the Kota Balun Hotel was of the same crash, the source of Elephant Joe's cloth was no longer a mystery. Sea boots with the tops cut off protected his elephantine feet.

His big woolly head was round and shining with cocoanut oil used as a pomade on the hair. His thick neck was scarred with whitish slashes where knives or razors had found their marks in previous years—scarred he was, like an ancient whale harpooned many times, but with the iron never driven deep enough to hold the harpooner's line.

His face was round and soft, nose flat and vibrant, and his lips thick and cut on lines of good nature—made for smiling, and mostly always set in a half-grin, as if he had just heard of something which amused him and in time would laugh heartily when he could give proper thought to the matter.

In his right hand he carried a small and delicate mandolin, fretted with strips of ivory along its neck. The left hand had been mutilated—trimmed down to stubs of fingers with a sharp instrument so that the first finger was the shortest of all, and the little one the longest. Thus the hand had the aspect of some triangular tool devised for delving in soft material. He had cut the fingers away himself, when his hand was trapped in a hatch of a sinking ship.

"Wow!" called Elephant Joe as he drew near the board, "Just smell that cawfee! And hen's aigs! We suttinly is livin' rich and slipp'ey, white men!"

THE three looking in the direction of the hotel turned back and sat down to resume the meal, hailing the newcomers with nods of salutation.

Phil Jones scanned the board with the egg-cups and the coffee-pot with sad eyes. He was the last to take a seat, and stood staring at the breakfast awaiting him.

"What's wrong with the chow, matey?" asked Port Light. "Don't it suit?"

"So you're at it again," remarked Phil.

"What's wrong?" demanded Port Light, squinting his good eye, always a sign of belligerency. "If you don't like what I've got, kick out of your bunk early and cook yourself."

"The cooking's all right," said Phil. "But I tell you again—this handing out the grub with the swanky hotel silver, is dangerous to the lot of us. We'll be caught with it, and then we're done for good and plenty."

Fenton nodded up at him.

"Maybe you're right, Phil," he admitted. "I've felt the same way about it, but I don't like to be at 'em all the time to be careful."

His agreement with Phil had been arranged between them, for Fenton was careful to avoid an excess of giving orders, so that when he had to handle the gang for some serious thing, they gave heed to him. So he had primed Phil to make it appear that the objection to using the silver came from Phil himself, when as a matter of fact it was Fenton who feared they might be trapped by being caught with stolen goods.

"Aw, no danger," said Port Light easily. "Who's to see the silver? We can hear anybody comin' along the beach by the crunch of sand under foot, and the same with the jungle on dry leaves—and as for boats, who can come near. Me—I likes a little swank with my meals."

"You luxury loving son of a sea cook," laughed the Dude. "But Phil is right just the same."

"Tyke no chawnces, that's my motter," said Toady Harry.

"Aw, what's the row, Dude?" asked Port Light with a glance to Thursday. "Takes only a few minutes to eat, and I've the hole ready in the rocks to dump the silver if there's danger—and cover it over with sand. What's the good of usin' old tins to eat, when we've got this silver."

"Melt the bloomin' stuff, that's what I says," remarked Toady, as he sat down in the sand near the board with its row of cups and coffee. "It's as Phil 'ere says—too much risk swankin' it with the plyte. No chawnce, I says again, for the lot of us. I wants no bloomin' jyle."

Elephant Joe lay down on his back alongside Toady and rested the mandolin across his middle. "Ah has mah say to say," he suggested, talking to the pearl-colored sky. "And this is it: White men, ah eats last—and I'm hongry. Let loose with the grub—ah craves mah aigs."

Phil sat down and helped himself.

"You said a mouthful, Elephant," agreed Thursday. "If there was less talk and more eating, there'd be less danger at having the silver seen."

Elephant Joe, when all the others were eating, roused himself and took an egg-cup and his coffee. "Ah knows mah place, and Ah keeps it," he remarked to the company. "Ah'm independent, because Ah don't have to be waited on. Ah takes mah turn on the kitchen job, but nobody waits on me no time. Ah knows Old Man Trouble by the sounds of his feet, and this boy knows no good comes from havin' a white man wait on him—it suttinly strains me if Ah can't he'p mahself."

He gurgled with laughter over his joke, and gulped his coffee appreciatively.

His hasty breakfast finished, Fenton got to his feet and returned to the little black box he had left on the rocks. He opened it, took out a gold-plated safety razor, borrowed a little warm water for his brush, and lathered himself with a stick of soap, using a little mirror in the top of the box.

"I'd take a whirl at that razor myself, if I thought it was good sense," said Phil Jones.

Toady Harry laughed scornfully. "You leave the shyvin' to Dude. The rest of us keeps rough-lookin'. Tyke no chawnces, that's my motter."

"You is the cookin'est man Ah ever did meet up with!" declared Elephant Joe to Port Light. "Them aigs! Po't Light, what you-all needs to be doin'-of is runnin' a ho-tel!"

"Listen to the retired chef," said Port Light, grinning. "I see through you—that crack's to keep me wantin' to have the cook-trick right along every day."

The black gurgled with the laughter which flowed so easily from him. "Don't you call me no chef—only on my cook-trick in this 'ere place does I look at grub and a fiah. Mah cheffin' days is over."

"No fruit with this breakfast," grumbled Phil Jones. "If I'd known you didn't intend to raid the Chinaman's mango trees this morning, Port Light, I'd have made the trip myself last night."

" 'Ark at the toff!" jeered Toady Harry. " 'Is tucker ain't good enough for 'im—needs fruit, 'e does, like a blinkin' first clawss pawssenger. Me! I 'opes as 'ow I don't see no more fruit in a month!"

"You drink too much trade gin, that's why you can't eat fruit," retorted Phil.

"Drop the arguments," advised Dude Fenton. "You'll need your wits for something else before the day's over. I don't want to start out on this job and leave a row behind me—eat, drink and be thankful, and take your ease. Things are going to change for us. If I don't miss my guess, I've a feeling that we'll make a mop-up out of this last trip of the *Palembang*. Her passengers look as if they might be plentifully supplied with cash."

" 'Ear, 'ear!" remarked Toady Harry, but without enthusiasm.

Port Light threw out a hand to seaward, and leaped to his feet. "Sail ho!" he cried. "A schooner—hull down—and heading for Port Retzenborg, or I'm a tailor!"

They all stood up for a better view of the strange sail on the glittering horizon.

"HO, YOU blighter!" cried Toady Harry in delight as he studied the sails of the schooner. "I know that beggar—I'd know her forty mile aw'y!"

"You big bluff!" said Port Light. "Know that schooner? How could you know a vessel that——?"

"Mind wot I'm tellin' you of," persisted Toady. "I knows that packet when she was blackbirdin' some four year back. Blinkin' Sydneyman, 'er!"

"My aunt!" spurned Port Light. "You know every ship that crosses hereabouts! Toady, you know too much! Don't pull that stuff on us—we ain't a lot of landsmen."

"And so I do know most of 'em that passes 'ereabouts," insisted Toady. "That there, she's the—the—wot's 'er nyme?—*Untong*, that's it! Out o' Sydney! Just mind that! Oh, for a sight o' Sydney 'Eads!"

"So you want to jump the gang, eh, and go back to Sydney?" asked Fenton, as he turned to Toady with a scornful look that was made more withering by the fact that his voice was low as he charged the cockney with a desire to break away from his life of ease.

"Wot of it?" asked Toady. "Ain't I got a blinkin' right to go where and when I likes? Am I a blinkin' slyve? Not me, Dude. You're an American—I 'as my rights, and you mind wot you're a sayin' of. One king is enough for me—don't throw no royal blood in my fyce!"

The cockney was ready for fight, and cared not at all who might know it.

"You can go where you like," said Fenton coldly. "Only when you want to go, say so. Don't pretend you want to go, and make everybody else homesick and down in the mouth. Shut up or get out!"

"Look 'ere!" shot back Toady. "I can git out, Dude! I'm a blinkin' wet blanket on this lot. I'll tyke my split o' the swag and 'op it! Come night, I'll be abord that Sydney packet as you sees comin' in, and ready to syle aw'y in 'er."

This was more than the Dude had bargained for. It was the first time he had failed to bluff down any insubordination. Toady Harry was too valuable a man to have in reserve—too handy with a knife—to let him go. Besides, there was danger in any attempt he might make to go alone.

His share of the loot that had been collected at Port Retzenborg consisted, in addition to cash, to sundry watches, rings, and silverware lifted from the Kota Balun Hotel. And Toady might be caught with the loot on him before the schooner got away. A few drinks of gin and Toady might well bring ruin to Fenton and the others.

Five pairs of eyes turned upon Toady. Fenton saw that he must change his tactics.

"You listen to me, Toady," began Fenton in deadly earnest. "Don't go off your head at sight of a dirty schooner. We'll all see Sydney again. And when we do, we'll be well fixed. One good cash haul is all I want, and then we've got something to work with. Plenty of cash! That's the ticket. You can't take a sea-bag full of jewelry into Sydney and sell it without being caught. You may be caught with it before this schooner sails with you from Port Retzenborg. Now have some sense—and leave things to me."

"Dude is right," said Phil Jones quietly. "We can't go to splitting up now. Let him make a good cash haul, as he says."

"Go a'ead and make your 'aul," said Toady. "Only don't myke me feel like a crimson slyve."

Fenton picked up the box with his shaving gear and gave Phil Jones a significant look. He waved a hand at the silver egg-cups and other dishes on the board.

"Put all this stuff away," he ordered. "Bury it in the sand again, Port Light.

And get out the tin cans for cooking, so it'll look around here as if we barely kept ourselves alive. Break a few coconuts and mess the place up a little, as if you'd just made a meal on the pickings of the palm-grove down below. It may suit my purposes to bring some of the passengers from the *Palembang* up the beach to see some real wild beachcombers. And if I do get one, and he's plenty of cash—" He shrugged his shoulders and jerked his thumb at Toady. "Give him the knife—we can't spend the rest of our lives here, waiting to pick up cash out of a drunken tourist's pockets at the hotel."

"I'd say that lot off the *Palembang* are all traders or planters—and they'll hate the sight of beachcombers." said Thursday.

"There might be a tourist in the lot—a regular griffin who wants to see beachcombers, and all that," said Fenton. "Now behave yourselves. Elephant, you give this sentimental crowd a song or two to lift their spirits. And Port Light—hand round the best cigarets and see if a little more luxury'll make the boys satisfied."

He strode away from them back for the jungle, and Elephant picked up his mandolin. He laid his maimed hand caressingly over the strings, snapped a bit of ivory out from under the bridge and, with a few preliminary notes, turned loose with a witching strumming. He laid back on the sand and opened his great mouth, drew in the morning air with a gulp that sounded like a grampus that has come up to breathe, and began, lullingly low:

"Ah'm goin' home, some old day, oh, ba-a-aby!
Ah'm a-goin' home!"

The refrain was in a minor key that was barely audible, and suggested a nurse singing gently to a child about to go to sleep.

"You goin' to sing that?" demanded Toady angrily. "Blawst you and your blinkin' 'ome! You fair gives me the creeps!"

"You shut up!" snapped Phil Jones, as the mandolin wept out its soul on the refrain and died away in the prattle of the surf through the holes in the coral reef.

"Yes, let him sing, Toady," said Port Light.

"Same boat brought me 'ere'll bring me back!
Oh, ho-o-o-ny!"

chanted Elephant Joe, with a new burst of melody from the strings of the mandolin and a liquid crooning of music from those great gross lips. The refrain was a sob, softened and made beautiful by the vaguest of music from the strings. Toady turned his face away from the others, his eyes leaking tears.

"Pa said to go, Ma said to stay,
Ah'll have a dollar some old day,
Blowed lak she never blowed befo',
Oh, ba-a-a-by!"

Once more the music of the mandolin died away in melody that suggested the strumming of the celestial spheres against a breeze from heaven.

"Yo'll shorely wait till Ah gits home,
To feed you on a big ham-bone, oh, ba-a-aby."

The big black cast the mandolin aside. The vibrations of its strings seemed to linger in the air, and still to echo through the sea-holes which countless tides had cut through the reef. The beating of the gentle swells seemed to have drawn the sic to themselves, and "Oh, ba-a-a-by!" in tones as soft and vague as one might hear in a seashell that had captured some fairy music, seemed to come lapping back with the slap and sigh of the water. Elephant Joe had performed the miracle of imparting the time and melody of his tune to the very sea itself.

"I CALLS it brutal, that's wot!" gasped Toady Harry as he stood up. He walked off toward the beach, shaking his head sadly.

"Where are you going?" demanded Phil Jones.

"None o' your blinkin' business!" retorted Toady without looking back. "But if you wants to know, that music has spoiled my breakfast."

"What's the matter with the singin'?" demanded Port Light. "Me, I calls it good."

"Too blawsted good, that's wot," said Toady, as he swung back toward them. "I says as 'ow Elephant Joe shouldn't go and fair break our 'earts with the likes o' that. I 'ad a 'ome once, and this is all very well for as far as it goes, wot with livin' easy. But some d'y I wants to go back where a man can live civilized." He waved a hand at the sun, and blinked moistly at the sand under his feet.

"You all craves hard work, Mr. Man," remarked Elephant Joe, to the sky. "Fo' me, every year is a minute and Ah never did have such easy times. O'ny thing strains [illegible] is Ah can't live lak this fo' ten thousand years."

"Oh, it's right enough, this cushy life," admitted Toady. "Only that music of yours makes me fair sick for a music 'all and the lights o' London."

"This beach is good enough for me," said Port Light, as he drew a tin box from the cairn of rocks and opened it, to lay out cigarets in a small and fancy-labeled packet.

"Aw, I'd swap fifty mile o' this crimson sun-blawsted beach for a sight o' Sydney 'Eads!" mourned Toady.

"Sydney Heads—and hard work, man!" chanted Elephant.

"You and your bloomin' tunes abawt 'ome!" sneered Toady. "It's you thet sat me off to git a nippin' o' Dude's tongue, singin' that song of 'ome! I awsks you, wot the crimson —— would you do if you did git back 'ome? All very well to sing it—but you'd be a bloomin' navvy with a shovel, or a cook in a blinkin' restaurant-car, that's wot."

"Ah could earn mah food and sleepin'-kit," declared Elephant easily.

Toady Harry took the reply as an affront.

"And so can I, you big black! I'm no curtail-dog—I've done my honest d'y's work, and I wants more than food to be 'appy. All very well for a kedge-belly to sit 'ere and chow and loaf—but what's the good of it?"

"Do you-all means that remark as pussonal at me?" demanded Elephant, as he sat up slowly and frowned in puzzlement at Toady. "What you-all means by kedge-belly. It don't sound polite to me."

"Not as I means to offend you, Elephant," soothed Toady. "Not me, I never picks on a man for his color—but wot's the good o' you pantin' and weepin' songs on this blinkin' beach abawt goin' 'ome—and then when I wants to go, sayin' as 'ow I looks for 'ard work. You looks for it yourself, or you wouldn't be a-singin' of 'ome the whole bleedin' time! Makes me fair sick for a wet pavement and the sight of a bobby and the lights o' a pub through a stinkin' fog!"

"Best imported Egyptians!" said Port Light, as he handed round the cigarets. "These come from the portmanty of some swell at the Kota Balun. Who's to make a row about the way we lives, eh, mates?"

"Ah stays 'ere till the world comes to an endin'," said Elephant Joe as he scratched a match on the sole of his short boot.

"There 'ere ain't no fair cigarets for a man to be a-smokin' of," grumbled Toady Harry as he lit a cigaret and then looked at it with critical eye and an upturned nose. "Smells like a bloomin' lady-maid's 'air, or a shavin' parlor I knows of in St. Kitts, back afore the war."

Then, as if his remembrance of the old St. Kitts had started a new line of thought with him, he went on:

"Them's the chaps as knows 'ow to myke rum. I knowed a chap once as went to St. Kitts—'e used to come down our 'ouse in Bermon'sey to 'ear our Johnnie play the flute—and——"

"Aw, give us another tune, Elephant," said Port Light.

Elephant Joe reached for his mandolin.

"Chuck it, Joe!" begged Toady. "No more—not now! When the moon's up, it's all right—when I can cry in the dark—but in this mornin' sun singin's fair indecent."

And Elephant Joe laid down his mandolin once more, willing to attempt to please the irritable cockney. Phil Jones strayed away to the jungle.

IV

FENTON was sitting in the doorway of the little *nipa* shack which the gang occupied, when Phil Jones entered the clearing.

"What did they have to say when I left, Phil?"

Phil shook his head in disgust.

"Nothing special—just the same old beef of Toady Harry—he's sick of things, and restless."

Fenton rubbed his freshly shaven chin.

"The Toad's getting hard to handle, that's plain—and he'll set all the others by the ears. I've a mind to let him take his split-up and get rid of him."

Phil sat down beside his chief.

"No knowing when he'll break loose, go down to some Chink gin-shop in the port and go swapping watches for a skinful of gin. That'll put the fat in the fire for us, sure."

"Yes, the Toad's about ready for another of his sprees, when he gets irritable. That's the danger with him. About five shots of trade gin and he wants to tell the world how rich he is—in stuff I've lifted out of the hotel. Nice mess he's likely to get us all in."

"Got any plans? asked Phil quietly.

"Nothing special—unless you and I get out in the *Palembang* and chuck the crowd. We could do it—we've got plenty of cash between us."

"I've been thinking of giving 'em the jump, myself," said Phil. "Just you and me alone from now on. Toady is dangerous—and he'll get the others restless and they'll break loose on a big drunk in the Port. They have it too easy—they can't stand prosperity."

"No, they don't appreciate our doing all the thinking for 'em—and take all the risk. It looks easy to 'em when I come back with a haul of stuff."

"Of course," said Phil, "we don't need 'em as long as things run along with us as they have. We're just holding 'em until we need 'em for some gang job. If something turns up that's big, and we need help to swing it, they'll all come in handy. It's play along for some big game, or jump out on 'em."

Fenton got to his feet.

"I'll go on down to the Port and look this *Palembang* crowd over. If they seem to have anything in the way of pickings, I'll get what I can—but only cash. It's no use taking watches and rings to be cashed in the future. It's all that kind of stuff that makes Toady restless. He wants to get to Sydney and turn his watches and rings into cash. I wish I'd never lifted a piece of jewelry, but I felt it kept 'em satisfied to know they were accumulating a pile of stuff. They promised not to dispose of any of it here, but they're not keeping that promise.

"Toady has been sneaking into town and selling some of his stuff—I know it. He's got a couple of quarts of gin staked out in the brush, and in the morning he always has a head on him—and a sour on the world. I'm on dangerous ground in the Port—I know that—so I've got to see to finishing things as soon as possible. I'll know by night, so meet me at the usual place, and I'll let you know how the land lies. I'm in favor of a jump out, if things look right."

"Then I'm with you," declared Phil. "Whatever you decide, I'll play in."

Fenton waved a hand of caution, and turned toward the narrow jungle trail which led into the hills for the main road to Port Retzenborg.

"Don't let 'em suspect there's anything cooking up," he warned.

Phil nodded. They listened for a minute to the sounds of argument from the direction of the beach.

Toady's voice, uplifted in a disgruntled wail, came through the barrier of brush.

"Wot I wants to do is be 'ome in time for Chris'mas and see a bloomin' pantomime!"

"Blast that Toady!" murmured Phil Jones, and turned to go back to the beach.

"Don't find any fault with 'em, no matter what they say," advised Fenton. "We'll want to give 'em the slip quick and easy."

With this last caution he pushed into the trail and started for the Port.

Working his way slowly to higher ground, in half an hour he had reached the edge of a deep cut which was blasted out of the rocks athwart the hill he was climbing. It was part of the road from the inland plantations.

It was ten feet or more to the hard rock bed of the road below. Fenton stood in the brush at the top of the cut and scanned the road in both directions. Then, sure no one was approaching from either direction, he pushed back into the jungle again and wormed through a tunnel-like passage formed by tying back the brush with rattans.

This secret passage was made without the necessity of cutting the vines and branches and leaving dead brush about to mark the trail. Fenton could not stand erect as he progressed from hole to hole through the leaves.

Fifty feet from the real trail he came to a lean-to of thatch that was not more than four feet above the ground and covered with green vines that had been drawn over it to conceal the brown, dead fronds of the thatch. It was a rain shelter of *nipa* and other palms bound to short bamboo poles supported by the branches of trees.

* * *

FENTON crawled under the shelter. In the gloom, he lifted from a box a piece of oiled and dirty tarpaulin. The box had a tin gable roof made from cans—like the roof of a dog-house. He lifted this roof upward and put it aside, taking care not to get rust from the tin on his fingers.

From the box he took a gigantic and spotless white sun-helmet, bound round with a green silk *pugri*. Next came a perfectly pressed and clean white coat and trousers. Silk underwear came next, with a white shirt of silk and a cravat of dull red round the loose cloth collar.

He got out of his old garments and dressed himself in the silks and whites. New white silk socks, a pair of spotless white buckskin shoes, and a crimson cummerbund which he wrapped about his middle over the belt of his trousers. Then he fumbled in the box until he found a gold watch with a black ribbon fob-charm.

A roll of banknotes and some silver coins went into his pockets. His discarded clothes were packed in the box, the cover and tarpaulin replaced and he stepped out into a hole in the jungle and put on his sun-helmet.

A beachcomber went under the shelter—and from it came a young man dressed like a millionaire planter.

Dude Fenton was ready to descend upon the Kota Balun Hotel, and mingle on equal footing with the best of the passengers from the steamer *Palembang*.

He could fit in any gathering of prosperous business men of the tropics—and not one would suspect that this well-groomed chap spent the most of his time hidden away in a jungle shack with common sailors who had turned beachcombers. As for being a professional thief—who could entertain such an idea about the affable and successful looking Mr. Fenton?

Carefully he made his way back to the main trail, taking precautions against getting his clean shoes soiled on the rotten wood underfoot and in the moist soil. The barbs of the lawyer vines reached out for him and sought to tear his garments.

At the edge of the cliff he again surveyed the road. It was deserted. He plucked a few flowers from a blooming vine so as to have a reason for being off the road in case he was seen climbing down.

From a crevice in the rocks he took a malacca cane and jumped to the hard surface of the cut. Lighting an Egyptian cigaret, he began to walk briskly in the direction of the Kota Balun.

He sauntered into the flats of a great palm grove on the near side of the hotel. With his sun-helmet on the back of his head and the *pugri* falling over his shoulders, he wandered about aimlessly so that from the hotel it would appear that he was simply taking an idle after-breakfast stroll in from a plantation to see the steamer crowd. Steamer day was always something of an event at Port Retzenborg.

At the hotel he always posed as a guest or an employee of some vague plantation back in the hills. For more than six months he had successfully carried out the imposture that he was a machinery agent making surveys for new equipment on various plantations.

This plan made it possible for him to always be about to leave the island, and when he failed to go, to explain that another plantation had asked him to remain and study their equipment needs.

As he was always well-dressed, quiet and apparently had plenty of money, no one questioned him closely. There was no reason to probe into his pretended business. He only appeared when there were strangers waiting for another steamer, and then disappeared again up the road toward the plantations.

On these occasions when travelers were staying over for another steamer, Fenton always found an excuse for taking a room at the hotel—it was raining, or about to rain, or he had found an old friend among the new arrivals. Thus he made reason for staying over a few nights. And he always took one of the most expensive rooms, ate his meals in it, except the regular rice-table in the evening, and loafed about on the verandas or in the bar. He knew best how to insinuate himself into acquaintance with strangers.

Fenton was really a likable chap—or could manage to appear likable. He knew how to mix with persons of wealth, and was capable of talking intelligently on the usual subjects of tourists or traders or planters. He was an adroitly unobtrusive person, and as the managers of the hotel were mostly Dutch and the servants natives, there was little chance that the truth about his secret life with the beachcombers would come out.

He was always careful to put his valuables in the hotel safe over night—and get a receipt for them. Not all travelers took that precaution for, while he used the safe himself, he kept the fact to himself.

Now and then, of course, there were thefts from the rooms—diamond pins, watches, or purses or money belts with considerable sums. Even Fenton had lost some of his things—generally at the same time that others reported losses from their effects. And now and then Fenton was at the hotel for a few days and nothing was reported missing—taken altogether, Dude Fenton knew his business.

Sometimes baggage was rifled of valuable articles after it was packed ready for the departing steamer. In such cases the theft was discovered too late for the managers of the hotel to hear of it—or the loss was laid to some pilfering steward after the sailing of the steamer. Fenton's methods had been developed into a system that was most efficient.

By the time Fenton drew close to the hotel veranda, the schooner which had been sighted earlier in the morning was mooring in the bay. Her dingey was already at the little boat landing near the *godowns*, proving that her skipper was ashore. Fenton noted idly that the name on her bowplates was *Untong*. He knew it to be the Malay word for good fortune.

"By George!" he told himself. "Toady Harry did know her, after all! Now he'll have something to crow about!"

The steamer *Palembang* was alongside her wharf, cargo coming out of one hatch to the dock, and going in from the dock to another. She was in a hurry to get away, and swarming with native workers and sailors. Bags of coal were going through her side-ports, for she bunkered at the island, the bunkers being owned by the same Dutch company which owned steamer, hotel, *godowns*, and some of the plantations.

On the veranda on the side from which Fenton was approaching the Kota Balun, he could see white-clad men at the tables inside the veranda rail, at breakfast. These, he knew, would be the passengers from the *Palembang*.

What pleased him most was the pile of luggage in front of the hotel, surrounded by a swarm of Javanese and Kling servants, all arguing about who should have the handling of the various pieces to the rooms engaged.

The head porter was reading off room-numbers from slips of paper sent out from the office after rooms were assigned to the guests. This plenitude of baggage told Fenton that the travelers were really leaving the *Palembang*, and would not sail away with her in a couple of hours.

"Rich pickings, there!" he told himself, and moved toward the coral path leading to the carefully barbered garden which surrounded the hotel. He lingered awhile to admire the flowers. It was a pretty spot in which the hotel was set. The tropical shrubs were cared for with the usual Dutch exactitude.

Paw-paw trees grew close to the verandas, shrouding them from the sun along the eaves. Here and there a tall palm lifted its mop-head a hundred feet or more into the blue sky, to throw a round blob of shadow on the lawns.

The low railings of the veranda were overgrown with blooming vines, which at the pillars ran up to the second story, and then spread out in a luxurious riot of blossoms on the red-tiled roof.

A bamboo framework cut the roof up into checker-board squares, and this framework held the tiles in place during a strong blow in the time of the changing monsoons.

The veranda was double, in that it provided a balcony for the upper story. All the rooms opened out on this upper veranda, and most of the guests spent their time on it, wearing only pajamas and loafing in reclining chairs. These chairs were used to sleep in on hot nights.

And as there was nothing in the nature of windows in the rooms—each "window" being but a great opening cut in the wall with a *kajang*, or sun-awning that protected it from the blazing light—it was easy for a thief to move from room to room and raid them while the guests slept outside in the verandas.

It was especially easy to raid the rooms when the guests happened to be traders or planters who drank plenty of gin and bitters and in consequence slept heavily.

The tinkle of glassware and dishes, the laughter of the guests, the trotting to and fro of Malay, Javanese and Chinese servants, the gabble of the porters and the chirping of birds in the garden or in the treetops, made merry morning music. When the *Palembang*, with her shrilling blocks and clanking battens, got out to sea again, there would be nothing but peace and quiet about the Kota Balun.

As he passed languidly along under the rail of the breakfast veranda, Fenton did not deign to look up at the men lolling about the tables. He appeared to have no interest in strangers, but moved along intent on his own thoughts as if making for the hotel with a definite and pressing business.

At the front stoop, he nodded pleasantly to the head porter, in order to establish with any of the strangers the fact that he was known by the hotel servants. Then he mounted the stoop—prepared to begin his little game for secret loot.

V

AS IT happened, the one English clerk of the hotel was on duty—a little man known as Bertie, who was an assistant. As most of the passengers from the *Palembang* happened to be British, he had taken the desk to assign the rooms.

"I'll have to stop over a few days," said Fenton. "I'd like the center room on the front veranda, topside—the room I always have, Bertie. And if any gentleman calls to see me, be sure to send him up without delay. I'm expecting two or three gentlemen from the plantations."

Fenton's voice was sufficiently loud to carry to the restaurant veranda. He scrawled a name on the register, pocketed his key, and went round the corner to the stairway, as if going up to his room. With him he took a supply of the hotel writing paper.

But once out of sight of Bertie, Fenton made for the bar.

At this hour in the morning, he knew it would be closed, and the *kajangs* down. But the door leading to it had a latch which could be opened by slipping a hand through a hole made for that purpose. Fenton let himself through quietly, and closed the door after him.

It was a room with polished hardwood floors and a few native mats of exquisite workmanship. Marble-topped tables with wire legs were ranged in a double row down the center of the room. At one end was a short bar backed by bottles on shelves and a large mirror.

Ah Sam, the Chinese barman, was polishing brass. His *towchang* was plaited on the top of his skull and the red silken end neatly tucked in under the concentric circles of the flemished mat of hair. He wore a blue frock and trousers wrapped about his ankles.

Ah Sam was a particular friend of Fenton's. The Chinese was in a position to perform favors of considerable importance in Fenton's secret operations—and Fenton paid well for these special services.

"Too soon come this side," cautioned Ah Sam. But as he spoke, he grinned affably.

"That's all right," said Fenton in a quiet tone. "I want to be alone—business. You catch me a *Picon* drink, and fetch talk-stick."

He sat down in a chair at a table as far away from the door as possible, where there was some light coming through the partly opened *kajang* on that side of the hotel. The veranda outside was deserted, the restaurant being at the far end of the front veranda.

Ah Sam brought the pencil before he mixed the drink. He let his *towchang* down, in order to be respectful. "Got plenty new ones come this time," he observed.

Fenton nodded and winked.

"Oh, yes, some strangers," he said, as he laid out his paper. "Now then, you wash your hands before you fix my drink—they stink of that awful brass polish. Don't you flavor my swizzle with it."

Ah Sam pattered away and Fenton began setting down columns of figures and adding them up. Any person entering the bar—and only an employee would be likely to enter for the next hour or so—would assume that Fenton was dealing in large sums of money. Fenton always carried about with him notes which had to do with substantial financial operations pertaining to new planatation machinery. These slips he managed to display when he found it convenient to impress new friends while chatting over a drink or a meal.

Ah Sam returned with the *Picon* and set it down. Fenton paid no attention, for he did not want to carry on a conversation and reveal his presence to the outer office of the hotel.

It was not long before he finished his pretended work and sat back to sip his *Picon* and smoke a cigaret. Presently he heard two men moving along on the veranda just outside the partly opened *kajang*. He glanced out and saw two pairs of white shoes as they advanced to a position near his *kajang*.

"There is nobody in this place, Captain, so we can talk without being disturb—the bar, not yet open."

Fenton recognized the voice as belonging to Mr. Hol, an auditor for the hotel company who came to Port Retzenborg about once a month to go over financial affairs and make an inspection.

"I just want a word in private," replied a voice strange to Fenton. "Just as well that nobody is around—or sees us talking together."

They seated themselves in grass chairs. The lower part of the *kajang* was opened outward a few inches, so Fenton had no view of them. All he could see was the bottoms of the rear legs of the chairs.

"I am not aware of this business," said Mr. Hol presently. He had a precise, English phrase-book way of speaking.

"Well, of course, you know the *Untong* is my schooner."

"Oh, yes—I know this. But to me, that mean little. Before, Captain, I have not hear of your schooner."

"No, she's new down this way. But, perhaps, Mr. Hol, it will mean something to you if I tell you my name—Stranlow—Captain Edward Stranlow."

"Of course, I have see your name in the hotel register, yes. You will stay with us a few days, I know so much—no more of you, Captain."

"I didn't expect you would know more than that," said Stranlow. "But as a matter of fact, I am in the employ of your company—though that information is strictly private."

"Oh, is this true? You are a company man? Certainly, I shall do for you what I can, Captain."

"Don't do too much—and don't give it away that I am anything special to you—keep it a secret that I am in the company's employ. But you must be aware that something came for me in the *Palembang*."

"No, I have no advice for this," said Mr. Hol.

"Then the mail-bags have not been opened yet?"

"Not yet, I think, Captain."

"Then they will be soon—and you'll find a large package for me. I might as well caution you now, that it consists of a shipment of cash for me. It is partly in gold coin, but the bulk in notes, for that is what I need in paying off white hands, and in buying supplies."

"Oh, you have money, that is it."

"Yes, I thought it would be better for you to know about it as soon as possible, because the packages will not show on the outside that they contain cash. It is a secret shipment. And it is just as well that you look after it, for if a package should be misplaced or broken or opened by mistake by some of your native help, it might be stolen. Anyway, the news might get out that I've got considerable money in my schooner, and that would make talk. People would want to know what I was up to. You understand, of course?"

"Oh, perfect I understand. I am glad you tell me this. There will be no delay, Captain. To this I will attend."

"Thanks. I have already had some trouble with three white men in my crew. I am paying them off here. That leaves me with natives—and I will need some white men, where I am going. So I shall have to wait here until some vessel comes in that can spare me some white sailors. I can't depend on my natives to back me up if I should meet with trouble where I am going. I'll have to do some exploring in wild islands, and wild natives may be suspicious—as they won't understand what I'm looking for or what I'm after."

"If I might ask—what is this you look for?"

"Oil. But I don't want it known. The company keeps a close mouth on what I'm doing. That's why I have to carry so much cash—I'll have to buy up land from native chiefs, and I've got to make it look as if I'm after plantation lands. Of course, oil and mineral rights will be included in the contracts, but oil means nothing to the native chiefs. I've got to be able to bottle up what I find, and that means I've got to be generous in presents to the headmen of the villages so they'll let me move about freely. I've got plenty of gin below decks, and a good cargo of trade goods to be used for presents."

"Yes, I understand now," said Mr. Hol. "I will attend."

The captain lifted himself out of the creaky grass chair. "Then we might as well let things go for now," he said. "And it's just as well that we're not seen talking together too much. We can't be too sure who these passengers out of the *Palembang* are or what their business may be. What they don't know won't keep 'em awake nights."

"That is correct," observed Mr. Hol as he got up.

"Just slip me the money packages and I'll get 'em aboard the *Untong*. We're not to be too chummy. I'll go back aboard now, but I'll manage to have another private talk with you when this crowd of passengers get out."

Captain Stranlow and Mr. Hol disappeared, one going to the front veranda, and the other moving off to the rear. As Mr. Hol's voice was presently heard from the back veranda, Fenton knew that it was the skipper of the *Untong* who had left for the front.

Slipping to a front *kajang*, Fenton opened it outward gently an inch or two. He saw Captain Stranlow making off down the coral walk for the beach.

"Here's something that looks worth while," he told himself. "It appears that the big mop-up I've waited for has walked in on its hind feet and begged me to take it along. Now, I've got to be able to handle this thing right—and it's going to take all the wits I've got to put it over."

VI

FENTON made his appearance of the breakfast veranda, where Mr. Hol was chatting with the *Palembang* passengers at their tables.

"Will the bar be open soon, Mr. Hol?" asked Fenton, his loose papers in his hand and a pencil over his ear.

"Oh, any time Mr. Fenton, it will be open now. Do you desire so early a drink, you can have it here."

"Yes, I know," said Fenton. "I wasn't wanting a drink, thanks. I thought I could go to the bar and be quiet with these cost estimates for machinery. But I can go up to my room—or it's pleasant enough here, maybe— Haven't seen you for some time around the place—we've missed you."

In this crafty little speech Fenton established some of the things he desired; first, to Mr. Hol that no one was in the bar while the conversation went on in private with Captain Stranlow; second, he had shown the passengers of the *Palembang* that he was a man of business who apparently spent most of his time at the hotel, and had a room there; third, that he knew Mr. Hol quite well and had missed him during his absence from the Kota Balun.

As a matter of fact Mr. Hol knew little about Fenton, except that he seemed a permanent guest, in that he was always there when Mr. Hol was making his regular visits.

The passengers glanced up at Fenton, mildly curious. They sat in pairs at the little tables along the veranda rail, dawdling over their coffee and cigarets and enjoying the sunlight and garden scents after having been several days in the cramped quarters of the stuffy little steamer on a blazing sea.

They all looked prosperous, and were plainly men of the tropics who had interests in plantations or trading—with one exception. He was a man who sat alone at a table, and being the ninth of the crowd, had no one to pair off with for breakfast.

He was young, and a man of ruddy complexion, smoking a long thin Sumatra cheroot. He stared into the smoke rising before his eyes reflectively, taking no interest in the others. One white-shod foot was sprawled out on a near-by chair, as if he suffered from the gout.

He wore a big straw hat pushed back on his head, a loose white jacket and white trousers of heavy duck which stamped the garments as having been tailored either in Shanghai or the Straits Settlements. It was not the white suiting of the far-off islands.

His blue eyes were keen. He turned suddenly and took in Fenton with an appraising but careless stare; interest, but not an interest that could be in any way offensive. He lifted his foot down from the chair and nodded to Fenton.

"This seat—perhaps you would like it. Sorry, sir, but I do not want to take up two chairs. I am leaving, and——"

"No, no, thanks," said Fenton. "I don't want to intrude. Don't run away—and I'll sit here, if you don't mind." He was always quick to seize an opportunity to strike up an acquaintance without seeming to be eager to know strangers.

The young man sat down again.

"Then I'll linger a bit longer," assented the young man.

"I'm really too lazy this morning to go on with these confounded figures," said Fenton, laying out his slips of paper before him. "I think I'll have coffee, if you don't mind." He suddenly gathered up the papers and stuffed them into his side pocket.

"Oh, certainly have your coffee," said the other, and lifted a hand in signal to a Malay waiter. "Charming little port, this—so restful."

"Then you've never been here before?" asked Fenton.

"First trip—didn't expect to stop over, but wanted a rest from the *Palembang*."

"Find business brisk these days?" probed Fenton.

"Business? Oh, I don't belong with these other gentlemen. I'm just touring around and taking a rest."

"How are things in S'pore?" asked Fenton, who always contrived to draw information from strangers.

The stranger looked a little surprized.

"How did you know I was from S'pore?" he parried.

"I beg your pardon," said Fenton. "Didn't intend to ask a personal question but I assumed you were from Singapore—your clothes are better, if you'll permit me to say so, than the ordinary trader about the islands."

The compliment drew a grin.

"You're a keen man, sir. I thought maybe you'd seen me in S'pore. Are you from there yourself?"

"I—I make my headquarters there, but I'm there very rarely. Have to spend most of my time in islands with plantations."

As if encouraged to further confidence by Fenton's affability, the stranger went on—

"Yes, I'm from S'pore. My name's Outridge—English, of course."

"Fenton's mine. Hope I can be of some service to you if you're going to stop over this boat."

"I am stopping over, yes." He lowered his voice and shot a careful glance to the other tables. "I don't take on well with the Dutchies, and I'm tired of listening to these commercial men on the steamer. They talk of nothing but trade—and money—and freights. Nice enough in their way, of course, but rather boring, y' know."

The other passengers were chattering away merrily again with their own affairs, apparently totally unaware that they were disliked by Outridge.

Fenton smiled appreciatively.

"I understand. I'm in trade myself—have to work to make my living—but I hope I don't keep up a constant clatter about shop. Like to rest and chat with a congenial chap now and then, and forget the confounded business and the counting-house. I'm here estimating for plantation machinery. But I won't be here much longer. Find it a bit stupid, as you will, if you stay long."

"Oh, I'm out by the next boat. But it is pleasant to know I've found somebody in the place who'll be congenial."

Fenton ducked his head in a little bow. They were getting on famously. Laying his sun-helmet aside, Fenton gave the Malay boy with the coffee a substantial tip.

"Pretty little schooner, that," remarked Fenton, with a jerk of his head toward the bay. "Presume she's a trader—though her lines are too smart for the ordinary trader that's generally seen in here."

"Quite so," said Outridge, without taking the trouble to look at the *Untong*. "But I presume there are a few interesting things to see on this island—plantations inland, for instance. I've heard there are some pretty spots. Taken care of like private gardens, and all that sort of thing, with labor so cheap."

He nodded at the great masses of blooming shrubs in the hotel gardens below.

"Oh, yes, some charming places," said Fenton. "I'll take you about the island, if you like, when you've rested from the steamer."

"Thanks awfully. I've nothing to do but kill time and see as much as I can."

"Then when you feel inclined for a little sight-seeing, just let me know, and we'll take a jaunt into the hills."

The invitation was easily offered for the simple reason that Fenton had little intention of ever carrying out his promise. He was after bigger game than a mere tourist, who rarely carried good sums of money.

"In a couple of days, when——"

"MR. OUTRIDGE! Sorry, but may we see you in the office for a minute. A matter of your room—we're afraid you'll not be satisfied." It was Bertie, the English clerk—and Mr. Hol was lurking in the background.

"Oh, certainly," called Outridge, and rose with a word of apology to Fenton. And Outridge disappeared in the direction of the lobby.

As Outridge left, it struck Fenton that the men at the tables had suddenly become quiet. He swung round in his chair just in time to see smiles and winks going among the travelers. And as they saw Fenton looking at them in surprize, they gave him peculiarly knowing looks. He continued to stare at them, puzzled by their cryptic smiles.

"That'll put a bit of a spoke in Mr. Outridge's wheel," remarked a gray-haired man of jovial face. He was a big man, and his whole appearance suggested wealth and importance. And as he spoke, he held Fenton's eye with his own, smiling quizzically.

"If I might venture to inquire," began Fenton, "I'd ask if there is anything—wrong—or mysterious, about Mr. Outridge."

"Certainly, venture all you like, my dear sir," said the big fellow. "I'm Bentley—trading in island products, of S'pore—and if I had the pleasure of your acquaintance——"

He spoke with a shade of pride about himself, as if his name usually brought deference when it was uttered.

"Fenton is my name, sir."

Mr. Bentley, having gone through the formality of knowing who the strange person was, wiped his glasses and cleared his throat importantly.

"I rarely discuss strangers with—er—strangers, if you'll pardon me. But we saw this chap making up to you. I feel it is my duty to say a word—to put you on your guard, as I might say—about this chap—what's he call himself? Outridge."

He twisted a thumb that pointed in the direction of the hotel lobby.

"You mean there's something I ought to know?" asked Fenton.

The others laughed a little, quietly and sedately, as if careful that Fenton should not think they were laughing at him.

"It's not necessary that you know, of course, but I'd say it is highly desirable that you do know," went on Bentley, in that peculiar style of the orator who is preparing an audience for something of a vital nature in his subsequent remarks.

"Then, sir, I should appreciate the information—and hold it confidential," encouraged Fenton.

"In the first place," began Bentley, looking critically at his glasses to make sure he had cleaned them perfectly. "Mr. Outridge's real name is not Outridge. He's known to the police of S'pore by another name—several of them, in fact. What they are does not matter here—I am not in the confidence of the police."

"I'm glad to be aware of what you say—of the history of the gentleman."

Bentley smiled knowingly, and went on in a subdued voice, but in his speech-making manner.

"That chap—who pretended to be a tourist in what he said to you—and you'll pardon me for having listened—we've seen quite a bit of him in the last few days aboard the *Palembang*. He has plenty of money, and all that, but he's a card-sharper. And you may not want to add to his prosperity. We've said a confidential word to the manager here, so as to warn him against any of this chap's tricks hereabouts—and a word to the wise is sufficient." He nodded his head as a sign that he had finished.

"Thank you," said Fenton. "He'd taken me in right enough about being a tourist. But I'll mind that he tried no tricks on me with his cards."

Another man in the party shook a warning head at Fenton. "It isn't cards only that you've got to be careful about—but watch your watch." The others laughed at this.

"I think I understand," said Fenton. "I'm obliged to you gentlemen for the warning."

He got up and sauntered in toward the bar, curious now to see what might be going on with Outridge at the hotel desk.

What Fenton saw was most extraordinary. Outridge, his shirt pulled up in front and the belt of his trousers hanging loosely from his hips, was holding up a large buckskin moneybelt which he had apparently just taken off.

"I don't see why you should be all upset about my ability to pay for my food and shelter here," he was saying to Mr. Hol in angry earnestness. "I never expected to be embarrassed like this—and it's a confounded outrage! But here's my ready cash—some two thousand dollars in notes. Count it yourself, if you like! You don't have to take my word for the amount. And if you feel I can't pay for what I get, I can go back aboard the *Palembang* and——"

"Don't trouble any more," soothed Mr. Hol. "I did not mean to——"

"You jolly well meant to make things unpleasant for me," went on Outridge. "It's an outrage, I say! I know that lot of rotters off the *Palembang* have said something to you about me. I'm not at all worried about that lot of rotten commercials, I'll tell you! Come to cash, I can buy and sell the half of them, I'll tell you that, Mr. Hol!"

"Please put your money away, sir," said the harrassed Mr. Hol, his face red. "I assure you——"

"I'll get out of this confounded place of yours by the first boat—yes, perhaps by that schooner in the bay," raged Outridge, getting angrier—or pretending to be more angry in proportion to Hol's apologies—as he saw that his counter attack was winning over the manager. Now he was strapping his fat belt about him and tucking it under the belt of his trousers. "You'll find, Mr. Hol, that it's not cricket to jump to conclusions about a guest who might stop here a month or more, and listen to the lies of a lot of traders, who pop in and pop out, with——"

Fenton slipped away to the bar and did not hear the last of Outridge's tirade.

"He's so mad," mused Fenton to himself, "that he probably won't put his money-belt in the hotel safe tonight—and two thousand dollars is not to be sneered at, even if I have bigger game in sight."

AH SAM was still busy with his rag and polish, wearing out the brass fittings of the bar. He looked up at Fenton, and got behind the bar to serve him.

"You know this feller—Outridge—talking now office side?" asked Fenton, pointing at the wall which was opposite the location of the hotel desk. Through the doorway the voice of Outridge, still raised in indignation, thundered at Mr. Hol.

Ah Sam listened. "Have got—can do," he pronounced with a nod, meaning that he would recognize the man of that voice.

Fenton leaned across the bar and whispered. "You give him drinks—maybe this night. You give him same stuff, all time we use for sleep—make him sleep long time."

Ah Sam gazed stolidly at Fenton. His wisdom was bland and unobtrusive. "Can do this," he assented. "I make this feller sl'ep—long time, hard."

Fenton asked for another *Picon*, and when he had finished it, left the bar for the front veranda. Outridge was still in argument with Mr. Hol, waxing more excited as he reviewed what had happened.

"And the best of this thing is," Fenton told himself as he sat in a grass chair and looked out over the bay, "that Outridge's baggage has gone to the upper floor. I'll roll him, and then not sleep in my room at all, but stick in the bar late and sleep down here in a chair. Also, I think I'll be robbed myself tonight, just as a little protection against suspicion of having had anything to do with Outridge's precious belt. I can't take any chances, as Toady would say, considering this *Untong* business in hand. I've got to be able to sail away in that schooner, if I can manage it, without the slighest blemish on my character."

He stood up and strolled down the coral walk toward the *Palembang*, hoping that he might run into the skipper of the *Untong* and strike up an acquaintance with that highly interesting person.

VII

PORT RETZENBORG lay under a white moonlight, the mop-heads of the palms fretted softly by the land breeze from off the hills that lay behind.

Shadow and light, blackness and sheening silver—neither was diluted in the slightest degree under that tropical moon. The fronds of the palms as they stuck out in wisps under the pressure of the upper breeze, looked like black seaweeds in a submarine garden, moved by an undersea current.

It was not difficult to watch the semaphore-like motions of the palm leaves against the bright sky and to imagine oneself a diver on the floor of a sea, looking up through marine foliage that waved in the water and stood out in clear relief against the sunlight up above the surface of the water. For the moonlight seemed to lave the land like some gently flowing liquid.

It was well after nine o'clock. In the black pit of the Kota Balun's deep veranda, a few cigars burned intermittently like comets flaming into sight and dying out in the tremendous distances of the unknown universe—to return in a few seconds on their orbits and blaze into visibility again. An eerie world was Port Retzenborg under the magic of the moon.

From the bar, dimly lighted so as not to draw the insects of the night, most of the travelers could be heard talking in droning voices over clinking glasses about the prices of hemp and the rising market on copra.

On the side of the moon, three men sat with their feet on the veranda rail, but kept their faces in shadow of vine-grown pillars. They knew that a tropical moonlight has its charms, but they believed also in the power of the moon to distort a face exposed overlong to its beams.

At the dark end of the front veranda two men sat in blackness, stretched out in reclining chairs, and chatting lightly after the manner of persons newly met and likely to part in the next few days never to meet again. It is a condition of affairs which leads many men into confidences which they would not confer upon their closest friends—and so, under certain circumstances, may be fraught with danger.

Their cigars were going comfortably. They gazed out over the dark gardens and the moon-swept jungle tops beyond. And from down the beach, beyond that rising jungle, there came the distance-softened strains of a mandolin. A soft and musical voice sang of the time when it would be possible to go back home. It appeared from some of the vagrant words which were intelligible even at that distance, that there was waiting for the singer, a baby.

Here and there fireflies looped glintingly through the gloom. Lights twinkled out of the velvety darkness of the jungle, where coconut-oil lamps of natives were moved across the openings that served as windows.

A dog bayed the moon down near the warehouse. It seemed strangely lonely and deserted now that the *Palembang* had tooted itself out through the reef a few hours agone. Only a toy vessel, carved out of jet, rode on the shining waters of the bay—the schooner *Untong*.

"If you're going to sleep in the hotel tonight, captain, you should be careful of your valuables," said Fenton in a low and confidential tone.

"Why careful?" asked Captain Stranlow.

Having met Fenton during the afternoon in the bar, and finding him an agreeable chap, Stranlow preferred to sit out on the veranda rather than mix with the strangers in the hotel bar. And Fenton had proved to be an interesting talker.

"Well, there have been thefts here in the past," said Fenton. "Naturally, the management keeps quiet about such things. And the hotel, of course, is not responsible, because every room has a card posted up advising guests to leave their valuables in the hotel safe. I'd be careful, sir."

"Oh, thefts can happen anywhere, I presume," said Stranlow. "But I've little to loose. I keep my money in a little safe aboard the *Untong*—and a mighty little safe I need, too." He laughed lightly at his joke.

"I couldn't lose very much myself," admitted Fenton. "But I thought it as well to inform you of how things go here—it's something I wouldn't speak of to everybody."

"Oh, I'm willing to be put on my guard," said Stranlow. "Thanks for saying a word about it."

Fenton's voice dropped lower. "I've a particular reason for mentioning the matter tonight."

"Particular reason! Why, how's that?"

"This party off the *Palembang*—there's a chap among 'em that'll bear watching, I'm told."

"Which one is it?"

"The card-sharper."

"Which is the card-sharper?"

"Fellow who calls himself Outridge—the well-dressed young man who smokes the long Sumatra cheroots."

"Oh, yes! That's the chap, sir?"

"Has the room next to yours—between our rooms, you know."

"Oh, now I understand why the manager told me to secure my *kajang* carefully when I went to bed. Said it would rattle if there was a breeze, and probably keep me awake."

"It wasn't the breeze that he was thinking of," said Fenton with a chuckle.

"He won't get very rich off what I'm packing," said Stranlow. "And as for his smoothness with cards—I don't play for money. So I feel safe."

"I was told to watch my watch," went on Fenton. "Of course, so far as Outridge is concerned, I know nothing but hearsay, but I've been warned that he's light-fingered in more ways than one. Still, there have been thefts here long before Mr. Outridge came on the scene."

"Now who do you suppose is up the beach playing that music?" said Stranlow. "It's mighty sweet music, whoever it is."

"Some white sailors who have been working on plantations during the stripping season."

"White sailors! Why, I didn't know there was a white seaman on the island!"

"Oh, yes," said Fenton. "They've had jobs as gang-bosses and so on. No longer needed now, and have been paid off. So while they're waiting for some vessel that'll need seamen who are white, they loaf up in the native town and amuse themselves."

"That's odd!" remarked Stranlow. "I can't understand why Mr. Hol never mentioned the fact that there are white sailors here. That's something I should know about."

"Mr. Hol wouldn't know much about 'em," said Fenton. "They're not known in the port here as sailors—simply plantation donkey engineers or foremen. Naturally, they don't spend their time at the bar of the Kota Balun. But I've run across 'em now and then, in my jobs. One—the fellow playing the mandolin—is an American black. He was a ship's cook, I understand, and got stranded here, but worked around on the various plantations."

"Any other seamen working on the inland plantations?"

"Not that I know of, Captain. Why?"

"Well, I'm looking for some white men for my crew. I've got natives, but I've got to have a white mate, and so on."

"Perhaps these men up the beach would do," suggested Fenton.

"No, I don't believe I want to ship a bunch of shiftless beachcombers."

◆

FENTON laughed. "I'd hate to hear those chaps singing up the beach called beachcombers to their faces, captain. There'd be a row, I know! They may be regarded as beachcombers by the managers of this hotel, but why should a seaman who's worked out the season on a plantation, come to the Kota Balun to live? Where can they go, when the busy season ashore is over, and they're waiting for a ship. There are no lodging-houses for seamen in Port Retzenborg, you know."

"Yes, I'm aware of that," said Stranlow carelessly.

"I happen to know," went on Fenton, "that these men have plenty of cash, as their kind go. They're living in a native shack for which they pay rent, and they buy their food in the native markets, and ask no odds of anybody. If that's beachcombing, then I'm a beachcomber. I've finished up my job of estimating for the plantations, and I'm staying here until the S'pore steamer shows up. And paying my bills. These chaps up the beach are doing the same thing, only on another scale, that's all. Of course, if they came to the hotel and spent their money at the bar, they might be popular—until their money's gone. But as I size 'em up, they're pretty decent as such men go."

"Certainly, that puts a different light on the thing," said Stranlow. "If they've been working—and want a ship—and are paying their way, we can't dismiss 'em as vagabonds."

"Of course, they're nothing to me," said Fenton. "Only if you happen to want seamen, you ought to know the facts in the case."

"I certainly want the facts. As I understand it, you've met them in the course of your work—and have talked with them?"

"Yes, I know a couple of 'em fairly well. They regard me, if I may be permitted to say it, as an utter swell. But one bossed a hemp-press with a gang of coolies, and another is a mechanic of sorts who kept machinery fixed up in some of the places where I've been talking about new equipment. Can't for the life of me remember their names at the minute—if I knew the names at all. Toady is one, I know—just a nickname—and one is called Jones, I think, but that last name may be a native way of pronouncing his real name."

"And you say they're looking for a ship?"

"So I understand. I'm sure of only one thing—this chap called Jones—I think he was mate of a trader and got sick here. I've heard Toady say he was a bosun himself, but you know such men will brag about the positions they've held."

He laughed as if in remembrance of unbelievable yarns he had heard from the men up the beach.

"Why not tell 'em to come aboard the *Untong* and have a talk with me?" said Stranlow. "That is, if you're likely to run across 'em. Don't go to any trouble about it."

"No trouble at all, Captain. I'll be up the beach tomorrow. But they'll want to know where you're bound for—and what wages."

Stranlow puffed his cigar a few minutes in silence.

"The regular wages, of course. What I want is a white mate—even if he hasn't got a ticket. I could use a bosun, a carpenter and a sailmaker. And I think you spoke of the black as a cook?"

"I'm under the impression he was a ship's cook."

"I'm not sure I want a black man for cook. The islands I'm making for are rather a wild lot—and I find natives are inclined to think a black man in the crew, who isn't a regular native—has been stolen and is in slavery."

"You know best, Captain."

"But don't say anything about the ratings. If I ship any of these men, I'll ship 'em as A.B's, with quarters separate from the natives, and good grub, of course. When I've got a line on such men as I take, I can promote as I see fit."

"And where'll I say you're bound for?" pressed Fenton.

Stranlow puffed again at his cigar before replying. Then he turned his head to make sure no one was about and listening, and brought his voice down to a whisper.

"I'm going to the Sedriana Group. Want to go down there and comb a few reefs and lagoons for pearl shell."

"Oh, I didn't know you were a pearler."

"No, I'm not exactly what you'd call a a pearler. I'm out on a scouting trip for a pearling fleet. I look over the ground for promising shell, and then make my reports to the company that employs me. But I hope you'll keep that quiet—I'm talking to you confidentially."

"Of course. I've nobody to talk with about it, even if I took the liberty of discussing your affairs. But how long do you expect to be gone? It's just my own question, and not at all for these men you want to ship, so don't answer if you feel it's none of my business."

"That's all right," said Stranlow. "I'm not making any particular secret of my business with you. I may be gone three months, or longer. Depends on how much time I'll want to put in on the various lagoons I look over. Sometimes I stick in a spot a week, sometimes I get out at once if the sign of shell is not what it might be."

"That's the kind of a trip I'd like to take some day, captain. Just have a good loaf and rest."

"I'm afraid you'd find it dull."

"No, I don't think so. I like the sea, if I can have it quiet. Passenger steamers, I dislike—but a schooner, and a congenial skipper—I always enjoy it. And I've made such trips."

"Then why don't you come along with me this trip?" said Stranlow, a trifle indifferently.

"I hadn't thought of it until this minute, and I'm due back in S'pore by rights."

"It's up to you," said Stranlow. "Come if you like—as my guest. I'm all alone, you know—nobody much to talk with. Do you play crib?"

"Fairly well, thanks." He said nothing more for a few minutes, and appeared to be thinking the project over.

"I suppose I could send my report to S'pore by mail," he went on presently. "I don't actually have to go myself. Matter of fact, my report is nearly all made out—what machinery is wanted, and so on, and how many men to send for setting it up. My job here is at an end now, and I don't need the money that's coming to me from my employers. I could let that ride until I get back to S'pore after this trip with you. Not but what I'd expect to pay my share of the stores."

"Don't worry about that," said Stranlow. "Just come along if you feel like it—you're as welcome as the flowers in May."

"It's something I'll have to think over, Captain. It appeals to me. I need a little romp after quite a siege of hard grind, but I've got to figure out whether I can afford to take so much time off. As a matter of fact, I can write the S'pore office that when I'm out with you I can visit some plantations of the Sedriana group, and combine business with pleasure. That is, if you feel I could visit an odd island or two for an hour, if things fell right."

"I couldn't go very far off my shell fields just to accommodate you. But I could drop in on an island that we happened to be passing—especially, if there was any chance of shell. And most of the islands need looking over."

"I wouldn't expect you to go out of your way, no," said Fenton grandly. "You'd have to be the judge as to where I landed, and my visits would be in line with your plans—or I wouldn't make any calls."

"I'm suited with that if you are," said Stranlow. "Think I'll turn in now." He stood up and stretched luxuriously. "And if you run into those men in ——"

"I'll be glad to attend to it, Captain. In the meantime, don't be fobbed off if anybody tells you they're beachcombers. Naturally, men who are not working are not popular in these Dutch islands. The Dutch hate loafing, even between jobs."

"What I want to do is sail," said Stranlow. "I'm not likely to get any help from the hotel about picking up sailors. If I size Mr. Hol up right, he's shrewd enough to enjoy having me hang about here a month or two, waiting for a crew—and paying Kota Balun rates and spending my money at his bar. I'll judge the men myself, depend on that."

"Then good night, sir. And thank you for your kind invitation, Captain."

They shook hands in the darkness, and the skipper wandered away to the stairs which led to the upper floor.

On the upper landing Stranlow passed Mr. Hol. "I think I'll be able to get all the crew I want," he whispered to the hotel man. "And this chap Fenton—he thinks he's going on a vacation trip with me to the Sedrianas."

"You mean—he go with you?" whispered Mr. Hol.

Stranlow waved a hand in dismissal of the subject. "I've got to give him the soft stuff, and make it appear that I'm not at all concerned about who knows my business. As long as he thinks I'm bound for the Sedrianas, no harm's done. So I've blinded his eyes on where I'm really going. Don't let me down on it—The Sedrianas, you know. I'm a pearling scout—savvy'?"

Mr. Hol nodded.

"You fool him all right. My! He will be mad when he find where you *do* go! He will yell!"

"Who the dickens is that snoring?" asked Stranlow, as he became aware of the regular trumpeting of some sleeper in a room nearby.

"That is Mr. Outridge. He drinks too much, and goes to sleep early. My, such a rumpus! I hope he will not disturb you, Captain."

Stranlow grinned into the candle which Mr. Hol had just lighted.

"No, he'll put me to sleep—it sounds like the surf on a reef after a hurricane!"

Mr. Hol gurgled with laughter deep in his throat, and went down the stairs softly.

VIII

IMMEDIATELY after Captain Stranlow left the veranda, Fenton went to his room. Men still lingered in the bar, chatting quietly or playing chess. After he reached his room Fenton could hear their voices dimly.

Outridge was snoring heavily. In the room beyond, Fenton could hear Stranlow preparing for bed. The grass chair creaked as he sat down to take off his shoes. While the skipper was still moving about, Fenton decided he had best carry out his plans without delay. It would be dangerous to prowl after Stranlow was quiet in bed, or asleep.

Before long the bar would be quiet, and Fenton would not have the cover of the noises of conversation and movement below. Also, men would be coming up and preparing for bed or moving about on the upper veranda.

Fenton folded two large handkerchiefs in peculiar shapes. When he had finished with them they looked like napkins formed into fanciful shapes so they would stand alone like pyramids. At the base of each pyramid was a corner knotted into a loop. These cloth pads he slipped over the toes of his shoes, as if they were light rubbers.

They protected the soles and heels from making a noise on polished wood floors where there was no matting. Thus he could move silently without taking off his shoes. He avoided the chance of being caught in stockinged feet, and in case of danger the pads could be kicked off and he could provide an excuse for being in the wrong room.

Outridge continued to snore with regularity.

"Ah Sam fixed him properly—and he's asleep for at least twelve hours," Fenton assured himself.

He moved to the open *kajang* which led to the upper veranda. The place seemed deserted. The moonlight shot slantwise to the outer edge of the veranda rail. There was a strip of darkness along the wall. He had but some six feet to go to be able to enter the room occupied by Outridge. Fifteen feet beyond was the *kajang* of Captain Stranlow's room. And Stranlow was still fussing about, so that Fenton was always aware of where the skipper happened to be.

He slipped out to the veranda. He stooped down to bring the lower part of the veranda between him and the outer moonlight. Thus he made sure that no person was concealed in that strip of darkness along the wall. He crossed the veranda to the vine-clad rail, to listen a minute and to make sure that his movements would not attract the attention of Stranlow.

With careful fingers Fenton plucked a half dozen leaves from a vine and slipped them into his side pocket. He had no weapons, for he always avoided using them in his work, knowing that the Dutch were strict about revolvers. The leaves in his pocket were safer for him—and he had already perfected his plan so that they could be used to advantage. The one thing Fenton prided himself on was his wits—he always had the foresight to plan for what would happen after he was successful in getting the desired loot. He maintained that the events *after* a raid were of more importance than what was done in preparation for the raid.

He slipped back to the wall, and keeping close to it to avoid creaks, glided noiselessly to Outridge's *kajang*.

"All clear!" he breathed.

He stepped over the high sill of the *kajang*, which was thrust outward from the bottom about three feet. He got in sidewise, and found himself in total darkness, the position of the *kajang* now marked by two triangular strips that revealed the outer moonlight.

Outridge snored on. Captain Stranlow was humming a low tune to himself as he moved about the dresser. Fenton heard him drop some loose change and his watch on the dresser as he emptied his pockets.

Moving into the darkness of the room, guided by the snores, Fenton gained the side of Outridge's bed. With deft hands the thief located the belt which Outridge wore about his middle—under the single sheet that covered him.

Carefully the three tiny buckles were loosed. Then Fenton pressed the ends of his fingers gently against Outridge's back, over the kidneys. The pressure was gradually increased, and then kept uniform.

For several minutes Fenton waited patiently. Then Outridge, between snores, sighed heavily. He turned over to escape that pressure on his back. As he turned, Fenton drew the belt from under him.

Outridge resumed his snoring with new energy in the comfort of his new position. That annoying pressure was gone and the sleeper settled down again into deep slumber.

Fenton lifted the snaps on each pouch of the belt and made sure the packets of notes were still there. Then he pocketed the belt. The trick was done, but there was still work to do.

Fenton moved back to the *kajang* and peered out to the veranda. To his surprize Captain Stranlow's figure was outlined against the moonlit sky beyond. The skipper was smoking a cigar and leaning against a veranda stanchion, gazing out over the bay at his schooner.

"All right, enjoy the scenery," thought Fenton. "I change my game to suit the situation. Stranlow is likely to slip over to my *kajang* to see if I'm in bed. So I can't chance things to wait here until he gets back to his own room and goes to sleep. And he may stick there an hour."

He moved straight back and passed the bed once more. The door to the outer hall was not locked, for there was little use of locking doors at the Kota Balun while *kajangs* on the veranda were open.

Fenton got into the hall and returned to his own room without making a sound. He slipped the handkerchiefs off his shoes, untied the fabrics, and pocketed them. He slipped off his shoes, and got into bed with infinite care so the frame or the cane bottom would not creak.

Then he sat up and flopped about noisily. He reached down to the floor and gathered up his shoes with a clatter.

"Confound you and your snoring!" he muttered angrily. He put on his shoes and tramped about on the floor where there was no matting.

Captain Stranlow came along the veranda and stopped before Fenton's *kajang* just as Fenton was applying a match to his little bedside lamp.

"So he woke you up, eh? Rather a nuisance, isn't he," laughed Stranlow.

"Hello! That you, skipper? Yes, I give up! I've been asleep twice. Now I'm going below for a drink. Join me?"

"No, thanks," said Stranlow. "I'll turn in and have a try for some sleep myself. He may not disturb me."

From the little Fenton could see of him, Stranlow was in his pajamas.

"I'll take a walk through the palm grove," said Fenton, "and see if I can't get sleepy enough to have some shut-eye in spite of that racket next door. By the time he has shifted gears on that snore, we may sleep. Listen to it! It makes the calendar hanging on my wall jump!"

"Well, so long," said Stranlow. "I wish you luck," and he laughed and moved back toward his own room.

Fenton slipped the packets of money out of his pockets and examined them at the lamp, standing between the light and the *kajang*.

"A little over two thousand dollars," he breathed. He tucked the notes away in various pockets and went into the hall.

* * *

THERE was a narrow passage that led to the back of the building. It opened on a rear veranda, where stairs went down to the kitchen. This was the service stairs, through which the servants brought food or drinks to the rooms of the upper floor. Off on either side of the stairs was a tiled roof, newly added to the building and so not yet overgrown with the creeping vines which ran up the pillars and the sides of the hotel.

Out on these tiles Fenton threw the moneybelt. He saw it laying askew like a snake newly killed. He took from his side pocket the leaves he had torn from the front veranda's vines. The leaves would be found with the belt, and the means by which the thief had gained Outridge's room would be explained to any investigator—a native had climbed the vines of the rear veranda, made his way over the tiled roof, and robbed the sleeper. And in making his escape, the thief had dropped the empty belt. So suspicion would be diverted from the other guests on the upper floor.

Fenton turned back and descended the regular stairs which led down to the lobby. He made no attempt to be quiet but let his feet clatter on the wood. He grumbled about not being able to sleep.

He pressed in to the bar, still muttering angrily. "Ah Sam!" he snapped, "give me a *Picon.*"

He turned to the four men who remained in the bar. Mr. Bentley was one of them.

"Sorry to be so upset about it, but I warn you gentlemen that if you're thinking of sleeping in any upper rooms, you're in for disappointment. That man Outridge jars the furniture with his snoring. I'm forced to go and walk about a bit—and then I'll get my sleep in a chair on the lower veranda."

"I've been up and tried to sleep myself," said Bentley in sympathy. "But it was no go—I thought I'd better come back here and hang on." The chess game was resumed.

Fenton drank his bitters and slipped a couple of gold pieces to Ah Sam. "Keep the change—you mixed that drink just right." He winked at the Chinese, who pocketed the gold coins and from his own pocket put a silver coin in the till in payment for Fenton's *Picon.* Ah Sam understood that he had been successful in doctoring Outridge's drinks—and that the transaction was successfully completed.

Lighting a cigaret Fenton went to the front veranda. In a few minutes he sauntered idly down the coral walk in the direction of the *godowns.*

For a quarter of an hour he idled about in the palm grove, walking back and forth, and keeping in sight of the hotel. He appeared to be seeking exercise, and not to be concerned with where he went.

Finally he struck off for the beach. When he got into the open moonlight he walked briskly over the hard shingle, then when he had gone twenty rods, turned and came back.

He kept increasing the distance he gained down the beach away from the hotel. This was toward the place where his companions had their shack.

There was a point of brush that ran down from the jungle to the beach. He sat down at the end of this point of foliage, rested and lit a cigaret.

"I've made a fairly good night's work of it, Phil," he remarked to the dense bushes behind him. "Cold cash—and a little better than two thousand dollars—all in mixed notes, and of fairly good denomination."

"*That* is a clean-up," came the voice of Phil Jones.

"First-chop good luck. It walked into the hotel and yelled at me to pick it up. But alongside of something else I've run into, it's mighty poor picking."

"How do you mean, Dude?"

"There's something big for us in the wind, if that gang can keep their shirts on."

"What's turned up? An American millionaire without his keeper—and his pockets lined with cash?"

"Better than that—Phil, here's where we jump this island."

"Good! I'll move along any time you say. The gang's getting too hard to handle. What are you going to do? Buy a yacht and take 'em on a tour?"

"You know that schooner that came in this morning?"

"Is that the big game you're talking about? She didn't look very rich to me. Thought she was a trader."

"She has her hold full of trade goods, yes. But she's here on some under-cover game. And she has fifty thousand dollars in cash in her safe."

"For the love of Mike!" marveled Phil.

"If she's cleaned up, who's to make a roar about her? If she doesn't turn up in some port, who's to make trouble? As I've said, her skipper—Stranlow's his name—is here on some smooth game."

"Got any idea what it is?"

"No. What I heard him tell Hol privately may be right—he's an oil scout on the quiet. But he told me he's going to the Sedrianas to hunt pearl-shell beds."

"Maybe what he told Hol is right."

"Maybe. But it doesn't matter—I know he's got a bunch of coin that came in for him in the *Palembang*. Stranlow doesn't dream I know—picked it up on the quiet. But if we could get that schooner and sell the trade goods in some wild islands and get away with the cash—it'd be the mop-up we're been waiting for."

"Then we'll need the gang."

"Sure. He wants some white men in his crew. I've told Stranlow that you're men who've been working on plantations, and spoke of you as a mate. He didn't cotton at first, but I swung him round."

"But how can you ship? Going to stow away?"

"Going along as guest. If he doesn't take on any of you, I'll have to stow you away, and we'll swing the thing by ourselves. No other whites aboard, you see. But if we can only get Toady and probably Port Light, the four of us will be enough to settle the native crew and handle the schooner. Here, take this cash. Slip it back to me when I see you tomorrow, and don't tell the gang how much we got. I'll divide up a couple of hundred dollars with 'em, and say that was what I made tonight."

He dropped the packets of money by his side, and Phil's hand reached out and picked them up.

"And take my watch," Fenton went on. "I'll make the first roar about thieves in the morning myself, and beat my chap to it before he finds his moneybelt gone. So I can't take the chance of having any of his money on me—you might slip me one note back—a small one. I'll use it to draw a herring over my tracks."

Phil Jones handed back one note. "Here, it's only a British pound note," he explained, after he had squinted at in the moonlight.

"You'd better drift into the port early in the morning before I get out to see you," went on Fenton. "Show up in your best sailor duds. That'll make it appear to Stranlow that you're after a ship, regardless of what I've said—it'll throw him off the track of a thought that I'm planting a crew on him. Get out to the *Untong* in a boat. Stranlow probably won't be aboard, but if you watch at the *godowns* after you've been to the schooner, you may catch him on his way to his schooner.

"Brace him for a berth as mate, and if you hook, put in a word for the others. Tell him Toady is a bosun, and Port Light a carpenter. If possible, get 'em all shipped without my having to talk to Stranlow about it again. I'll wander up the beach, because I'll want to have a talk with the gang. Don't tell 'em anything about the plans or what's in the *Untong*. I'll spring that on 'em myself—and give orders. Then I can come back to the hotel and tell Stranlow I couldn't find any of you. You be back at the shack by nine o'clock, so you can be there and listen to what I tell the gang. We've got to play canny all along the line. I'll mosey back to the hotel now and not be away too long."

"I'll show up early in the morning for the *Untong*, and go through with things," said Phil. "Good luck."

"Luck yourself, Phil."

Fenton rose and strolled up the beach toward the Kota Balun.

IX

"I TELL you I left my money-belt in the safe!"

It was the angry voice of Outridge, just after dawn. It reached the ears of Fenton, asleep in a reclining chair on the front veranda. The birds were chirping in the hotel gardens. From the upper floor came the angry growls of men waked from sleep by the uproar in the hotel office. Fenton sat up to listen.

"Sure I did! I know what I'm talking about! Don't try to bluff me out of it—you've got my money! More than two thousand dollars in a buckskin belt! I want it!"

Servants cleaning the side verandas began to gather to hear the row. The low tones of the clerk, pleading for quiet, drifted out to Fenton's ears.

"I have no record of your having

deposited any money in the safe, sir. But please don't make so much noise. It's early, sir, and the safe can not be opened yet. And last night you had been drinking a little. There may be a mistake on your part, sir."

"I was drinking more than a little last night," admitted Outridge. " S matter of fact, I was tight. Never got tight so quick in all my life! Had two or three drinks—and they made me sleepy drunk. Had a hard job to get to bed. Funniest thing I ever saw. Ordinary, I can drink all night and not be under the influence. But that stuff your bar-boy hands out—not only made me drunk—made me ill. I've been ill for the last two hours—and I'm still groggy. But that's neither here nor there—I come down here for my money-belt, and you swear I didn't hand it over for safe-keeping. I'll jolly well see about that! I know I left it with the clerk—the Dutchman, not you. I've a distinct recollection of standing here with my belt in my hand and turned it over, and——"

"Then if you left your money you should have a receipt, sir. Anyhow, you'll have to wait and take it up with the clerk who received it—and wait until he comes on duty and the safe is opened."

"Oh, hang the receipt! I don't believe I took any. Can't remember any. I trusted this hotel, and I want my property!"

The wrangle went on, Outridge refused to be satisfied with anything but an admission that his money-belt was in the safe.

Fenton grinned.

"Here's luck! That Outridge chap is a trifle muddled from the stuff Ah Sam doped him with, and finding his belt missing, hasn't the slightest idea yet that he's been shaken down for it. This gives me time to fix up a game that'll cinch the fact that a native got away with the cash."

He threw off the light covering, and in his pajamas went round to the restaurant veranda where the breakfast tables were being covered with linen. The servants were busy wiping the matting. Fenton grumbled about having been waked, dropped into a chair and pretended to fall asleep.

The servants resumed their work as the trouble in the office waned. Fenton dropped the pound note which he had taken back from Phil Jones, and presently wandered back to the chair he had deserted on the front veranda. As he settled himself, he could see the note he had dropped under the other chair.

In a few minutes a Malay boy, wearing only a loin cloth, appeared with a bucket and a mop. He began cleaning near the note. He picked it up, looked about to make sure the other servants had not seen him, tucked the note into his *chowat*, and went on with his work.

Fenton left at once for his room on the upper floor. As he approached the stairway, he saw Outridge still in argument with Bertie.

As Fenton dressed himself he heard Captain Stranlow moving about in his room.

"I say! My watch is stolen!" cried Fenton. "Left it in my trousers last night when I went below to sleep! And it's gone!"

"Hello! What's that?" called Stranlow through the wall.

Fenton broke out in angry complaints. "I say my watch is lifted. And Outridge is having a row with the clerk about a moneybelt. Outridge swears he put it in the safe."

"The entire hotel knows that much," said Stranlow. "I've been trying to sleep through the racket he's made. But, while I'm sorry for you—I think it's amusing—it was you who warned me to put my property in the safe. And now you're nipped."

"And you'd better look through your things," said Fenton, as he hastily tied his shoes. He departed for the lower floor and broke in on the harrassed clerk. Outridge stood aside, giving a nod of recognition.

"Look here!" began Fenton crossly to Bertie. "I've been robbed! Left my clothes in my room last night and slept on the front veranda outside here. And my watch—worth a hundred dollars—is gone!"

"I'm sorry, but we'll have to disclaim responsibility," said Bertie. "Guests are cautioned to leave their property in the safe, and——"

"Oh, yes, your safe!" exclaimed Outridge. "All I hear is your confounded safe! Well, I left mine in your bally safe, and now you say you've no record. Mr. Fenton, you've lost your watch by not putting it in the safe, but I wonder if I'll get my two thousand after I've put it in the safe."

"You've nothing to worry about, Outridge. I'm not questioning the honesty of the clerks. But it is a confounded nuisance to be left at the mercy of a lot of native servants, roaming about in the halls at all hours of the night, and sneaking into rooms."

"What servants were in your room, sir? We'll do all we can to recover your watch. If you've any suspicions—any idea of the servant who might have taken the watch——"

"How should I know who got it, Bertie? I ordered nothing during the night. But I did see a boy in the hallway when I left my room a little after midnight. A Malay, he was, I'd say. Got a good sight of him as he passed a lamp. I'd know him, I think. When he saw me he scuttled for the back veranda. Naturally, I thought he was from the kitchen or the bar. But I'll bet he hid in the servants' stairway, and when I came below he went into my room and lifted my watch out of my trousers. I slept down here in my pajamas."

"We'll see about it, sir," said Bertie. "We'll have all the servants up at once, so please keep quiet, sir, so they won't all know your loss has been discovered. There's been too much row made as it is. Here comes Mr. Hol—he'll take charge of your cases, gentlemen."

The blond young Dutch clerk arrived with Mr. Hol, both looking annoyed and showing signs of having dressed hastily. They listened to Outridge with grave faces.

He shook his head doubtfully as he looked over the two or three duplicate receipts for valuables deposited in the safe.

"I doubt that you turned over your money-belt, sir. I have no recollection of anything in connection with your belt or your money, except that you showed the belt to Mr. Hol yesterday when you desired to convince him that you had funds to pay for any expenses you might incur. You did not leave the belt or the money for safety with me."

Mr. Hol went to the safe and rolled the combination. He took out a tin box containing envelopes and packets.

"There is nothing here of yours, sir," said Mr. Hol. "You can see for yourself. We cannot be held responsible."

Outridge, in blank amazement and rage began to storm. He insisted that he had turned in his money. By this time other guests began to arrive from their rooms, grumbling as they came down the stairway, and staring disgustedly at Outridge.

Captain Stanlow appeared, wearing his sun-helmet. He lingered, looking on, as if waiting for an opportunity to attend to some business with the hotel on his own account. The servants began to gather in the lobby.

"I shall hold this hotel responsible for my loss of two thousand dollars!" cried Outridge.

A native servant came running down the stairs. He held in his hand a long strip of light-colored material—the empty buckskin belt that belonged to Outridge.

In high excitement, the servant held up the belt to Mr. Hol and explained in Malay that he had found the empty belt out on the tiling of the roof of the rear veranda.

"That's my belt!" cried Outridge. "There you are! I told you the hotel had it! And what's this boy doing with it—and empty? You can't disclaim responsibility now and——"

But no heed was given to Outridge. Mr. Hol and the two clerks bolted up the stairway, demanding of the boy to be shown the exact spot where the belt had been found.

The other guests went out to the restaurant veranda, but Outridge, Fenton, and Captain Stranlow remained in the lobby.

"This is certainly a bally madhouse this morning," said Stranlow. "I'd like to have a cup of coffee before I go out aboard my schooner, but there's no chance. I think I'll drift along."

OUTRIDGE dashed away to the upper floor, explaining that he should hear and see what went on. "If I'm not present," he said, "they'll cook up something against me by having a servant admit theft from my room, when as a matter of fact I left the belt with the clerk."

"You ought to be there," said Stranlow, with a wink to Fenton.

Fenton laughed and shrugged shoulders.

"What do you make of it?" asked the skipper.

"It's all a blind. I don't believe this card-sharper lost his money at all."

Stranlow was surprised.

"A blind? How do you mean? What good would it do him to make all this fuss if he didn't lose his money? And there's his empty belt—picked up out on the tiles of the roof!"

"It's this way, as I see it," said Fenton in quiet tones, disregarding the voices from the upper hallway. "Outridge tried to get the hotel to believe he had a couple of thousand dollars to meet his expenses. The bluff worked—they didn't examine what was in his belt. Now, he threw the belt out on the roof, swears he left his money in the safe, and is trying to bilk the hotel into paying him back his money to avoid trouble."

"Pretty smooth business, that," declared Stranlow. "I'd never thought of it in that way. You ought to say a word to Mr. Hol on that theory."

"There's more to it than that," went on Fenton. "I think he's the blighter who got my watch. He's playing at being robbed to divert suspicion from himself. His snoring—that was all rot, to fool the lot of us."

"My word!" said Stranlow, looking admiringly at Fenton. "You are a keen 'un! It's the cleverest bit of work I've ever heard of! I wouldn't have seen through the dodge in a year of Sundays!"

"I may be wrong, of course. I thought at first a Malay boy I saw in the hall last night was the chap who got my watch—and look here! There he is now—the chap with the bucket and mop!" He pointed to the boy who had picked up the pound note.

"He looks scared—knows you're talking about him," said Stranlow. "And he's edging away. He does look guilty, and wants to get out, so——"

Fenton darted across the lobby after the Malay boy, who dropped his bucket and mop and attempted to flee as Fenton started for him. But Fenton caught him and dragged him across the lobby to Stranlow.

The cries of the startled boy brought the outer guests running from the restaurant veranda. They looked on in surprize as Fenton held the native in his arms facing away, and probed into the folds of the *chowat*.

Out came a concave brass box which fitted over the Malay's hip. It held *sireh*—for betel-chewing. Then came a few coppers and a piece of bone carved so that it served as a charm—and the one-pound note.

"Now we have it!" cried Fenton. "What's this boy doing with a pound note? He isn't paid off in English notes, I'll bet! He probably doesn't know what it's worth!"

To the boy, Fenton said, "Where you catch this?"

The boy, terrorized with the realization that there had been thefts in the hotel and that he was trapped with money which did not belong to him, whined and spluttered in Malay and bits of Dutch, that he had not taken the money, but had found it on the restaurant veranda.

"Likely story!" said Fenton to Stranlow. Turning round to the other guests, Fenton said, "I'll wager that this is part of the money from Outridge's belt, with——"

Mr. Hol came dashing down the stairs. Some of the servants had run to him with word that the thief was caught. The whole crowd from above came trooping down. Mr. Hol demanded to know what had happened.

"Ah! You have find the t'ief!" cried Mr. Hol, when he heard Fenton's explanation and saw the crisp, fresh note. "And you say this is very boy you see above floor last night, eh? I have hear of it! He no business upper floor, this boy!"

"Look at this note, Mr. Outridge," said Fenton. "Did you have any such notes in your belt?"

Outridge took the note from Fenton's fingers.

"Cerainly! That's some of my money. I had quite a few of these—real, new ones, you'll see. From the bank in Singapore. And it's folded just as mine was—twice across, so as to fit into the pockets of my belt! Look here! This proves it!"

He took the belt and fitted the folded note into the little pocket from which it had been taken.

The Malay pleaded with Mr. Hol, asserting that he had found the money, and was not a thief.

"Ah! So you lie to me, eh! We find you went up to the back roof—we find leafs on the roof! And last night Mr. Fenton is see you in the upper hall!" He turned to the Number One Boy of the servants, a big Chinese. "Take this boy out and give him twenty bamboo! I show my servants they cannot lie to me—and steal!"

The wailing boy was dragged away. All the servants were summoned to be questioned, in an attempt to discover where the missing money might be hidden. Screams came from the yard behind the hotel, as the bamboo rods were laid on the Malay boy's back.

"Well, I'll get out of this," said Stranlow. "I've business for a few minutes aboard my schooner." He took from the clerk three large packages that had come by mail, nodded to Mr. Hol and signed a receipt for them. "See you later," he said to Fenton, and departed.

The packages under the skipper's arms Fenton knew must be the money—or part of it—which had arrived for Stranlow in the *Palembang*. The fifty thousand dollars was being moved aboard the *Untong*.

And as Stranlow walked down the coral path for the beach, Fenton observed a figure in clean dungarees and wearing a pilot cap, lurking about the warehouses at the dock. It was Phil Jones, waiting to approach Stranlow and seek a berth as mate in the schooner.

FENTON arrived about nine o'clock behind the point of rocks where his beachcombers had their lair. He came straight up the beach, without any attempt to conceal where he was going from those at the hotel, explaining before he left that he was taking a walk to avoid the confusion attending the row about Outridge's loss. The investigation was still in full swing when he left, and while the money had not been recovered, there was no doubt about who had committed the thefts. The Malay boy was chained to a tree.

So Fenton, in his hotel clothes, wearing his sun-helmet and carrying his cane, was a figure of elegance and affluence now in comparison with his appearance the morning before when he left his companions.

And the beachcombers had changed their appearances. They were shaven and clean, and instead of their rags, now were all dressed in clean working clothes—faded dungarees, straw hats or canvas caps. They wore shoes or boots. Their seabags were on the sand, and they squatted on them, ready to listen to what their leader had to say. They looked like honest and respectable seamen—all but Thursday Smith; his clothes were a trifle better than the others, and his trimmed beard might have caused him to be mistaken for a ship's doctor.

Fenton had already had a private conference with Phil Jones—just a minute in passing, during which Fenton had received back some two hundred dollars of the cash looted from Outridge.

"Well," began Fenton to his assembled men, "I understand that Phil has shipped as mate in the *Untong*——"

"I told you as 'ow I knew that blighter of a schooner!" broke in Toady Harry, his sunburned face showing spots of light skin on his cheeks, now that he had lost his beard.

"—Has shipped as mate," went on Fenton. "And it looks as if there's a good chance you can all ship in her, if you play your hands right with the skipper."

"Yes, it's all to be decided when Stranlow has had a chance to look 'em over," said Phil. "So I've got 'em ready to move into the Port."

"Now," warned Fenton, as he sat down carefully on a rock, "I want to say a word about care in Port Retzenborg. In the first place, you know that the minute you go past the point here, you've left British soil, and are in Dutch territory. The boundary line cuts this island hereabouts—you know that—and the Dutch can't touch you here. But in the Port—if you drink or make any trouble, you may be grabbed. You know the Dutch would like nothing better than to pick up the lot of you on any charge. So mind your eye before the *Untong* sails."

"We knows all that, Dude," said Toady. "Wot we wants to know, is wot's the lay?"

"I'm coming to that in a minute. When I leave, you'd all better wander down to the jetty. I'll go back to the hotel through the hills and tell Stranlow I couldn't find you. In the meantime, you'll probably be shipped—and it'll look better that way. This trick can't look too rigged up, or the skipper'll have none of us."

"It's all very well for us to be shipped in that schooner," said Toady Harry. "But wot I wants to know is where is she bound for?"

"Hold your tongue and give the Dude a chance," said Phil sharply.

"Ho! You're the myte of the *Untong* now, and we're only swine of sailors! That's it, is it, my 'earty?"

Toady was jeering now, but there was good-nature in his jeer, and Phil had too much sense to take offense.

"Let the Dude talk, and shut up!" said Thursday. There were murmurs of assent, and the others hitched closer on their bags to listen. Elephant Joe had his mandolin over his shoulder, and his eyes were glistening with anticipation.

"This is where we mop up," began Fenton. "We've been here long enough. It's time we moved on. If you play the game with me, and take your orders and carry 'em out, we'll be in Sydney in three months —with plenty of cash."

"My aunt! *Sydney!*" cried Toady Harry joyfully. "That's wot sounds like it to me!"

There were gasps of astonishment and pleasure from all the others—except Elephant Joe. He shook his head a trifle sadly.

"We should have a couple of thousand dollars in cash—maybe more." said Fenton, "It remains to be seen. We may make even ten thousand a man in the final split-up."

"I'd ship in a blinkin' bawth-tub for the likes o' that!"

"Are you talking seriously, Fenton?" asked Thursday.

"I never was more serious. I want this talk of 'swine of sailors' stopped. We've all got to play our proper parts in this game. No rows, mind. If Phil, as mate of the *Untong*, gives you rough talk and treatment, take 'em—he's got a reason. He can't let this skipper think it's a gang of pets that's being shipped. And you look to that, Phil—don't be too ready to make the skipper think these chaps will stand by you rather than by the skipper. Don't talk 'em up too much, but show you can boss the job. If there's the least suspicion that I'm too thick with the lot of you, we're likely to miss the chance of our lives."

"Cawn't a chap awsk a question without 'avin' 'is —— 'ead knocked off—'ere amongst ourselves?" asked Toady Harry.

"That's all right—here! Look out for what happens in that schooner. You'll take orders—and no growling."

"I always 'as—and I will now. You're my skipper, Dude—and Phil 'ere, I'll tyke my h'orders from 'im. Didn't I always do my bit?"

"You have. But you've fretted a little lately, and we can't chance this job with one man on the least of a raw edge. I want you in on this, Toady—you're too handy with a knife to leave out of it."

"Oh, there's a knifin' job, eh?"

"Never you mind talking of it now."

"Orl right! I'm in for this commish. And if I'm 'oldin' things up with my gab, don't mind me—go a'ead. I've no mind to stop the meetin'."

"Then it's this way. The *Untong* is loaded hatches-full, with rich trade goods. I got the tip in private. He told one man he was going scouting for oil, and told me he was bound for the Sedriana Group for shell. But what's he doing with holds full of trade goods? He has natives aboard as crew. He could use them for oil or shell work. But he wants a white crew, and he's beached some of his white men. I don't dare go look them up in the Chink gin-shops and ask 'em questions. Mind, if you run into any of them, don't ask questions. We can't have Stranlow fobbed off us by showing too much curiosity. And keep out of the gin-shops at the Port."

"Wot does 'e want white seamen for?" asked Toady, his face twisted in a reflective study.

"For fighting purposes, that's what," said Fenton. "He's on an under-cover business—but that doesn't concern us. What we want to do is get off the land in that schooner."

"Ho, I see! We grabs the schooner, sells off the tryde goods to natives in the southern islands, and 'its out for Sydney with the blinkin' cash we've made—and scuttle the *Untong* when we've done with 'er."

"That's it," assented Fenton.

"She'll 'ave some cash, too, for tryde," commented Toady. "That's not to be spit at."

"I doubt she'll have much money aboard," said Fenton. His eye wandered to Phil Jones.

"Traders don't carry much cash. You ought to know that, Toady," said Phil.

"There's little to expect in her but trade goods," said Fenton. "But they'll make us rich."

"Ah'm a'goin' home some old day, oh baby!" hummed Elephant Joe, shaking hands with himself gleefully.

"Me for London, in good time—and a first clawss ticket!" declared Toady.

"But how are you going to come along with us?" asked Thursday.

"I'M GOING as the guest of the skipper. That means I won't mix with any of you—but be a little cold and distant, though I've met you off and on at plantations. You're below me in class—and don't forget it. You'll get your orders from me through Phil, because he'll be aft where I can get a word to him privately now and then. And Elephant Joe may be able to get the cook's berth, though Captain Stranlow is against taking blacks who are not native. So I want you to understand that when Phil tells you to do a thing, the order comes from me—and must be obeyed. The man who lays back, no matter what the order is, gets his share cut as I'll decide when the pay-off comes.

"If I see the slightest break in program—there'll be somebody to pay for it. You can work things out your own way, but Phil and myself could pull this game off by ourselves if we had to. I've always played fair with you, and I'll play fair unless you dish this business. You've lived fat and easy under me, and I've done the work and taken the risks, giving you your share so you'd stand by until something like this came along and I could use you all together in a gang-job. Now the *Untong* is waiting to be taken. You can drop the game and stay here on the beach—any of you or all of you—or ship in the *Untong* and get in on the pay-off. Who's for staying behind?"

"Ah stays right with the bandwagon," said Elephant Joe.

"Count me on it, and no questions asked," said Port Light.

"I'll stick, —— or high-tide," said Thursday.

"Wot's the use of talkin' like we'd 'op out on you?" demanded Toady Harry, in hurt tones. "You think I'll stay off a crimson fortchin?"

"Will you take orders—and no growling?" demanded Fenton.

"I'll bite the —— blacks, if you'll awsks me," said Toady. "We're all in on this, as the Dude and Phil wants, eh, mateys?"

They all gave willing assent, assuring him in chorus that Fenton's word would be the law, and Phil Jones the chief prophet.

"All right, then," said Fenton, briskly. "And now about your sea-bags. Have you got in them all the silver and jewelry that's been hidden away?"

"Not a thing left behind," said Port Light. "We didn't have time to melt down the silver egg-cups and a few other trifles."

"Where are the silver pieces?"

"We split 'em up between us," said Port Light, walking into Fenton's trap.

"I thought so," said Fenton, with a grim smile. "And now I'm going to give you a chance to obey orders from the jump. All the silver has to be left behind—even what has been melted before. Not a piece of that stuff goes aboard the *Untong* in a sea-bag—or in any other way."

"You're right!" declared Thursday. "I've been telling 'em the same thing before you showed up, but they wouldn't listen."

Dismay came into the faces of the other three. Phil Jones looked away, out over the sea, as if he was not concerned in what they thought of Fenton's amazing and disappointing order.

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Toady Harry, in weepful tones, spoke.

"Do you mean all the blinkin' swag that's silver? That's nice to 'ear, I must say, when we've been told all along we're to 'ave it. Wot's to be done with it, if I might make so bold as to awsk?"

"Bury it here," said Fenton coldly. "It'll keep—and we can come back for it if we ever need——"

"That's a jolly nice tune to pl'y," declared Toady in total disgust. " 'Ere you been payin' os orf with silver and the like, out of your pickin's at the 'otel, and we thinks we got a fair pile o' swag! Now you say we're to bury it like a blinkin' pup with a bone, on this crimson beach, and syle aw'y to try and myke our bloomin' fortchins on another job of work? Wot if we don't get the schooner? Wot then? Do we go on a beach again, and vag it?"

There were guarded murmurs of approval of Toady's stand.

"You fatheads!" Fenton broke out, knowing he could best handle the three by abusing them. "Have you no brains in your heads? Are you a lot of simpletons? Can't you see beyond your noses? Or have Phil and myself—and Thursday—to do all your thinking for you, and fight with you in the bargain, to put a fortune in your hands?"

"Wot's the blinkin' 'arm to tyke along the silver?" asked Toady.

"What's the harm?" scorned Fenton. "No harm at all, you fool! It'll be a fine thing for some of the native crew to fish in your sea-bags, steal silver egg-cups or other silver with the name of the Kota Balun on it, and sell it ashore before we sail from Port Retzenborg. In a quarter of an hour after he's bought it, the Chink'll be telling the hotel where he got it, and after a reward for returning it—and informing. Then, with the *Untong* still in port, the lot of you'll be dragged ashore and your sea-bags opened. The evidence'll put you in a Dutch jail for the rest of your lives! That's all the harm, Toady, you woodenhead!"

The grumble of the others was now directed at Toady, for they saw he had been beaten down.

"But wot abawt the jewellyry we've got? Cawn't we tyke that along?"

"One watch apiece, and keep that out of sight," said Fenton. "And the diamonds—if they're out of the rings—yes. But no silver, mind—melted or unmelted."

"That's rotten luck," said Toady.

"Say! You haven't got fifty dollars worth of silver a man! Are you going to let that junk wreck our chances! Don't be fools! Bury the lot. I'll not take any of mine. And if I can leave mine behind, you can yours. And more! I'll pay you fifty a man for the silver, in cash. I got about two hundred dollars out of a room last night, and I'll take no share of it to prove I'm right. A hundred of it is mine, by rights, but I'll give you the lot to split up—and another hundred of my own to split, for the silver. How's that?"

"I sees it your way," said Toady. "Beggin' your pardon for stickin' my lip in, but wot we wanted to know was wot you wanted from us, and that's correct, eh mytes?"

He turned to the others, his face glowing with sudden virtue, now that he could be the leader in assenting to Fenton's orders.

The trio agreed, all being relieved that the matter was smoothed over.

"Wot's the silver and the jewellry all good for any'ow, I awsks," went on Toady.

He had his little trick for maintaining his secondary leadership, and now he pertended to take credit to himself when he knew he had no choice in the decision.

"Glad you understand it from the right angle, Toady," said Fenton, ready to shift from blame to praise, for he needed Toady more than any of the others.

"You generally have good sense when a thing is explained to you, I'll say that."

"Tyke no chawnces, that's my motter," said Toady. "And keep things movin', I says. Give the word, and I'll pull my weight on any bloomin' rope."

"Now then, I'll have to get back to the hotel," said Fenton. He took the roll of money from his pocket. It was part of the Outridge loot.

"Here's all I got last night. And you can split it yourself—and here's another hundred of my own. I've always played fair with you chaps, and I'll continue to do so if you'll play my game."

He tossed the bills to them, and with a wave of the hand, jumped up on the rock barrier and left for the Kota Balun.

XI

SCREAMING the seas from before her bows, close-hauled under a northerly breeze, the schooner *Untong* drove to the southward over a moon-bright sea. She fore-reached with the grace of a wheeling gull, her sails white in the night's brilliance and her trucks flirting with the low-lying stars that twinkled playfully among her topmasts.

In her bows, under the shadow of her foresail, there was a cluster of black shapes. One figure, sitting astride an overturned bucket, loomed up against the seas ahead like the statue of some gigantic character of mythology. But the figure swayed with an easy motion to the heel of the schooner, and as it swayed, the monstrous head lifted to the stars as if in wonderment over the beauty of the night.

The ratlines sang in a low, soft monotone, and with regular rhythm as they slacked and grew taut again with each caress of the swells against the schooner's stem.

There was another gentle sound that beat against the planking—the soft fall of a bare foot that sought to catch the pulsations of the rigging. Presently foot and rigging fell into time and there was a melodious twang that seemed to break from the very skies themselves—a lilting minor that might have come from a harp in heaven.

It came again—and again—sweet, and in time with the schooner's roll. The upthrust head lifted higher and a soft crooning that challenged the croon of the seas swelled upon the moonlight.

"Ah'm goin' home, some old day, o-o-o-o-h
ba-a-a-aby.
Tum-tum-tum-tum! Ah'm a-goin' ho-o-o-o-me!"

Elephant Joe sang that formless song with his soul. He used words without rhyme or reason, and setting them to a music of his own which had probably come down to him from his jungle forefathers, he made a song of infinite longing, with a melody as natural as the strumming of wind through an African forest.

"Strike me pink, but you ought to be in the 'alls at 'ome, you black!" declared Toady Harry, when the negro let his song die away in the softest of string-picking.

"Best I ever heard, bar none," declared Port Light. "Nice pickle we'd ha' been in, if the skipper handn't taken you as cook, Joe."

Port Light lay on his back, staring upward.

"You know wot?" said Toady importantly. "Skipper didn't want the black because 'e said the nytives of the Sedrianas would be suspicious of a black in white men's togs. Suspicious! Ho! Ever 'ear the like o' that?"

"Poor old Thursday!" said Port Light. "He was a good chum—but he gits cold feet at the last minute and decided not to come along with us. I done my best with him, but I couldn't git him to come near the *Untong*."

"Good job he didn't," said Toady. "I never 'ad no trust for that chap—too much of a toff for the likes of us."

"Thursday was a good sort," insisted Port Light loyally. "But he was afraid of somethin'."

"You know wot?"

"No. He was a close-lip. Never a word would he drop to give me a thought on it."

"I knows," said Toady, with certainty.

"There was somethin' wrong with Thursday—somethin' he feared like."

"Sydney, that's wot he was a-feared of. Sydney, and the blinkin' police."

"Cripes! You've struck it!" said Port Light. "Minute he knows we're for Sydney, I could see a look in his eyes—a powerful fearin' look. And he didn't talk so much to me, from then on. Only once, this mornin', he has a chance down near the water when we was alone. 'Port Light,' he says to me, 'I got a feelin' in my bones I don't want to go in this *Untong*. Stop ashore with me and we'll go it alone.' I thinks it over, but decides to stick—and as we're comin' down the beach to the Port to see the skipper and ship, he bolts into the jungle, and that's the last we sees of him."

"You know wot?"

"No, Toady."

"'E's a slick un, is Thursday. Figures it out that if he skips us, 'e'll 'ave all the silver and jewelry we buried—and a fairish lot it is, too. Better, 'e says to hisself, to 'ave this swag and be safe, then look in the eye o' a Sydney bobby—and be tooken up for murder, or the likes o' that."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Port Light thoughtfully. "But we was in luck, if we was to lose Thursday, to bring Joe here along—and his mandolin."

"Me, Ah tells him Ah'd throw away mah pants when we gits to where them natives is at—and look so wild I'd scare them canniballers," chuckled Elephant Joe. "Ah cooks in this schooner, says I to the skipper, if all I wears is a chicken bone in mah nose."

"Not particular easy for you to ship yourself, Toady," said Port Light. "Know what the skipper said about *you?*"

"Wot?" asked Toady in a tone of indifference.

"Said you looked like a cockney troublemaker—and would be always on the growl."

"I'll show 'im a bit of trouble-makin'—on the point of my knife," whispered Toady viciously.

"It was Phil that fixed things up for you," went on Port Light in the barest of whispers. "Phil said as how you was the only man as was fit to ship as bosun—and he needed you."

"And so I am," declared Toady. "That's the honest of it."

"Sure it's the honest," agreed Port Light. "That ain't what I'm talkin' of—I says it was hard enough for the lot of us to get shipped. Particular beggar, the skipper. But I know what he was afraid of."

"Wot?"

"He was afraid that Elephant Joe and you might be hard to handle when you found the schooner wasn't bound for Sydney at all, but was for the Sedrianas—and this cruise is a bluff. He didn't want anybody who might be dangerous."

"You was good enough for 'im, eh Porty? You're the fair-'aired boy 'e fancied for a sailor, eh? Well, I'll show the likes o' 'im afore the night's done—I've 'ad a borry of Joe's sharpenin'-stone from the galley, and I've give my knife a fair whettin'."

"That'll be a powerful lesson to him, when you gives him a stab," laughed Elephant Joe.

"Hush it down!" warned Toady. "Don't

you know the nytive sailors is idlin' in the dark o' the waist, aft there?"

"Then it's tonight we strike?" asked Port Light.

"The night," said Toady cautiously. "Dude'll be sittin' out on the quarterdeck with skipper, for a bit of a chat after they sup. Phil'll 'ave the deck. When he calls me aft, that's the signal for the gyme to begin."

"What next?" asked Port Light. "This is the first chance we've all had to know, since Phil gave you the word. We better know now what's to be done."

"When Phil calls for'ard for me, you all lay aft and stop a bit at the scuttle-butt, as if you was for a drink of water afore turnin' in for watch below. Phil'll tyke me far enough aft for a word so I can watch my chawnce—and I slips my knife. There'll be a call—you rush aft along the windward runway. That puts us all together soon as skipper's done for, and we can fight if the nytive crew acts up."

"Easy enough, it sounds," said Port Light.

"Wot's the matter we can't do for one white man in this packet—and the lot of these nytives, too, come to that."

"But why so sudden-like?" asked Port Light, as if he shrank from murder so abruptly. "Why not give us all a chance to think it over—and know the schooner better and the lay of things?"

"The night's as good as any to finish off this job o' work," said Toady. "Keep things movin', that's my motter. Do you mind that when we've done for the skipper, we all live aft? I enjoys a good bit o' tucker—why live on crew grub when we can eat in the cabin?"

"Right enough," agreed Port Light. "Come on, Elephant—give us another rally with a song. It makes things sound peaceful-like, and the skipper, hearin' us singin', won't think there's no danger in the wind."

"Ay, a bit o' music," said Toady. "Won't do skipper no 'arm to 'ave a bit o' music afore 'e gits my knife. It's the last o' singin' 'e'll 'ear this side o' Jordan."

"I wonder how old Thursday is makin' things, all alone in the old shack," murmured Port Light.

"Never you mind Thursday," said Toady. "I'm fair sick o' 'earin' of that toff. 'E never belonged with the likes of us—'e's a blinkin' ship's orfficer wot's lost 'is ticket, that's wot. I knowed the beggar'd slip 'is cables on us, come first chawnce."

"Poor old Thursday," sighed Port Light. "He was a good enough chum for me."

"You wishes you'd stopped back with 'im, I knows," said Toady. "You wait—come mornin', you'll be aft—and a blinkin' owner of this packet and the tryde goods below 'atches."

JOE struck his fingers across the strings again, and sang the delight that was in his soul, anticipating the wealth that was soon to be his.

Toady, keeping an eye aft, could see at times, Captain Stranlow pacing the weather side of the quarterdeck, and Fenton walking with him. Phil Jones stood near the native helmsman, leaning on the cabin roof and staring ahead into the night.

In the shadow of the sails, these figures were dim and indistinct, but when the moonlight fell upon them they stood out in sharp relief against the glistening seas astern. Fenton, Phil and Toady were waiting for what they considered the proper moment.

Most of the native crew were loafing in the waist, for while the wind was fair and the barest watch was needed, the natives preferred to remain on deck to hear the music of Elephant Joe. And Port Light was in the bows, on lookout, so the routine of the schooner was in order.

Four bells struck—ten o'clock.

"Bosun!"

It was Phil Jones, now at the break of the deck, and peering forward.

"Ay, sir!" answered Toady. He got to his feet, and fumbled at his belt to pull his sheath-knife forward on his hip, ready at hand. To his companions he gave his final order before moving aft for his night's work.

"To the scuttlebutt, right after me, and mind you have your knives ready. Keep together—and rush aft when you hear a call. That's to let you know my blade's found its 'ome—there'll be no slip from me, mind. But you may 'ave to bear a 'and with the nytives when I've done for skipper. Not 'avin' a gun, mind you're 'andy with your knives, and tyke no chawnces!"

Stooping to clear the stay, Toady hurried aft. And Elephant Joe once more struck the strings of his mandolin and sang lustily a bar or two.

Then the big black and Port Light moved aft, joking as they went to the scuttlebutt, which was lashed to the forward bulkhead of the cabin.

"Bosun, break out the paint-gear in the morning. I've a job you might attend to, and it's as good a time as any to show you what's to be done. This 'paulin on the cabin roof is gittin' to leak, and needs mendin' and fresh paint."

"I was noticin' of it myself, sir," said Toady. He mounted the three steps of the quarterdeck, following Phil Jones.

Phil moved aft slowly, running his fingers along the edges of the whipped-down canvas side of the cabin roof.

"There's a spot aft here that's special bad," continued Phil. "I'll show you where it is, and you can turn to on it some morning."

He drew Toady still farther aft. Captain Stranlow was walking with Fenton, and they were talking. There was nothing suspicious about the boatswain and the mate discussing the work for the next day.

Toady edged ahead of Phil, and reached the after corner of the cabin roof—on the weather side, where Stranlow always turned to go aft again.

Phil and Toady went on discussing in low tones the defect in the tarpaulin.

The moment came when Captain Stranlow was within three feet of Toady, the boatswain having his back to the skipper.

The captain made his turn aft. Phil Jones threw up a hand in signal to Toady that things were right.

Toady swung round, knife out, and lunged forward with his blade-hand in a straight stabbing stroke for the kidneys.

Captain Stranlow whirled. He did not lift a hand—but a yellow jet of flame rose slantingly from his hip. There was a dull report. Tiny red sparks flew from the yellow flame—bits of fabric sheared away by the bullet as it leaped through the side pocket of Stranlow's jacket.

The up-angled slug of lead struck Toady in the chest. His feet left the deck in a convulsive little jump, for the big automatic pistol carried a blunt ball, and as Toady was not more than two feet from the muzzle, the heavy charge of powder got in its full effect with velocity and lifted the boatswain off the planking. The impact hurled him backward and he fell in a limp heap in the narrow runway between rail and cabin bulkhead. His knife clattered away musically.

"Sydney!" he gasped. "No Sydney for——"

Port Light and Elephant Joe came rushing aft.

Captain Stranlow, now with a big automatic in each hand, waved a weapon menacingly in the direction of Phil Jones and the two sailors.

"Stay for'ard, you two!" bawled Stranlow.

"What'd you shoot him for?" demanded Phil Jones.

"For'ard yourself, mister!" cried Stranlow. "Keep 'em off my deck! I don't want any piracy aboard me!"

Phil, seeing the skipper's gun on him, backed away, waiting for Fenton to do something. And Fenton was watching his chance to grasp one of those wavering pistols, which swung about in a wide arc crazily—dangerous to Fenton.

Phil knew something had gone wrong. There was no time to think—it was a moment in which more was happening than either Phil or Fenton had looked for.

"For'ard! For'ard!" yelled Phil to the two who rushed upon him from the break of the deck.

He threw up his hands and waved them back. They understood that he meant what he said. The gasping figure of Toady underfoot stunned them, and the sound of the shot from Stranlow's pistol gave them proof enough—if the boatswain's body did not—that they had lost the first skirmish for possession of the schooner. For neither Phil nor Fenton had a firearm.

They hung in stays a minute, too amazed to obey Phil's order promptly. And gazing aft, they saw what Phil saw as he turned aft to distract the attention of the skipper so that Fenton could do the work that was needed—an attack on Stranlow from behind.

"Mister, get them men aft!" warned Stranlow once more. His back now was partly to Fenton, and Phil Jones drew his breath quickly, seeing that the chance was open—and Fenton might miss it.

A figure darted from the wheel—the native helmsman. Just as Fenton lurched forward to grasp a pistol from Stranlow's hand, the native struck. There was a dull sound to the blow—a *smack*. It caught Fenton alongside the head, low, near the neck. The Dude dropped like a pole-axed steer.

The helmsman stepped back to his wheel

and gave the schooner a spoke or two, and steadied her on her course.

"Mister—you git forward! Drive them men to the waist!" and he sent a shot over Phil's head.

"Blast you, get for'ard!" roared Phil now. He fled from before Stranlow, knowing that for the time being they had lost. The only hope was that Fenton, knocked senseless, might have a chance to begin the attack anew later. It appeared that the helmsman had lost his head and, volunteering to aid his skipper, had struck down the guest of the schooner by mistake. It was plain enough to Phil that the skipper could not be aware that his new mate was hand in glove with the new crew, else why had Stranlow fired that second shot into the air.

"If he was on, he'd have pinked me along with Toady," reasoned Phil, as he swung his arms and thumped Port Light and Elephant Joe forward, pretending to rain blows on them. "Get for'ard you swine! How many times you need the tellin'? Who called you aft? For'ard, I say!"

"We ain't done nothin'," wailed Elephant Joe.

"You wait till you're called for, and——"

As the three of them stumbled down the steps from the quarterdeck, they found themselves assailed in an unexpected ambush. The whole native crew was out on deck, and had huddled behind the bulkhead of the main-cabin. From that vantage spot, they hurled themselves upon the three, and with iron belaying pins battered the three men to their knees.

Not one of the trio had a chance to use their knives. A dozen of the despised native sailors were upon them like a hurricane out of a clear sky. The three were borne down to the deck from all quarters, beaten and clawed with vicious energy and blinding, smothering effect.

Elephant Joe called for help, evidently thinking that he alone was beset. "You Phil! You Phil man!" came the muffled tones of the big black from the mass of flying pins and waving arms and trampling feet.

Phil Jones fought as best he could, blinded by blood from his eyes, and barely conscious as he swayed upward to his knees, only to go down again. Vaguely, he knew that Joe had made a mistake in calling him by name. Captain Stranlow might hear his black cook pleading for help—by the mate's first name. In those cries for help from the big black, the skipper might grasp the key to the situation, and realize that all his crew were leagued against him. That would be piracy—and black ruin! That was the final thought of Phil Jones as he sank unconscious under the pack of bare brown feet and the blows that flattened him to the planking.

XII

WHEN Fenton became aware of the fact that he was once more in the land of the living, he could hear vague and dreamy voices. They seemed far in the distance, and there was a roaring noise that blurred the words and left them without meaning. And his head ached with a violence that was beyond bearing.

The voices grew fainter—and the Dude fell back again into a merciful unconsciousness.

Again he wavered on the borderline of that vague world where voices could be heard. He managed to get his eyes open. Above him was a whirling planet that swam in a sky of yellow brilliance. It must be the moonlight, he thought. But the moon should not be a black blob swinging uncertainly back and forth across the sky.

He decided that what he took for the moon must be the swinging lamp in the main-cabin of the *Untong*. He could not be on deck. He had been brought below. And something had gone wrong—disastrously wrong. Just what it was, he had no way of knowing. His head was a frenzy of pain.

He was on his back—on a transom-seat that ran athwartships on one side of the companionway leading to the quarterdeck. His face turned away from the bulkhead, for he wanted to see who was talking. It sounded like Stranlow's voice, quiet and matter-of-fact in spite of some terrific things that had happened.

He closed his eyes against the pain that the light of the lamp only made worse. But Fenton wanted to see—and he took the extra pain in order to look.

There was Stranlow, sitting at the cabin table. There was a mess of stuff spread out on the cloth. And Stranlow was speaking in low tones to somebody. He spoke soothingly, and then Fenton became aware of a low sobbing sound.

Making an effort to remember, he suddenly realized that the sobbing sounded strangely like the singing of Elephant Joe. But the big black would not be in the main-cabin. That was too puzzling for Fenton to reason out for the moment. He closed his eyes again to think.

"Elephant Joe got hurt—in the fight, that's it! And Stranlow has brought him into the main-cabin to look after the black's hurt. That means Stranlow can't understand that we're working together against him—and Toady—but what's become of Toady? Did I see him shot? And what happened to me?"

He groaned and lapsed into unconsciousness. He did not know how long he was lost to the little world of the main-cabin with its swinging lamp. But when he recovered again, he heard Stranlow giving quiet orders to the native *serang*—and talking the native lingo.

Elephant Joe was sobbing noisily. Stranlow's voice soothed him.

"Now tell me where you got this money I took from your pockets," urged Stranlow.

"Ah gits that money fo' a job I has in a plantation," replied the big black, from where he lay on a side transom near the table.

"And they paid you off in British notes, Dutch paper, and American money, eh?" pressed Stranlow.

"That's right, boss," said Elephant. He checked his sobbing now, eager to set himself right with the skipper.

"And the money the mate has—and this other man you call Port Light? Did they get paid in the same money?"

"Same way, boss."

"And Mr. Fenton, there? Did he get paid off in the same way?"

"How I knows how Mr. Fenton gits his money, suh? I ain't no banker man for that swell."

"Mr. Fenton had a lot more money than you did. See that pile there? It came from Mr. Fenton's pockets. And a great deal of it is folded in the same way that your money has been folded. How do you account for that?"

"I don't know nothin' about his money," said Elephant.

"Didn't you get this money from Mr. Fenton?"

"No, suh! How come Mr. Fenton be payin' me?"

"That's something for you to answer, not me. I asked you if you didn't get it from Mr. Fenton."

"Not me, no suh!"

"How do you account for the fact that the money you have, and the money the mate had, and the money Port Light had—is all folded the same way?"

"I don't know nothin' about this, Cap'n, suh."

"Well, I do," said Stranlow. "About eighteen hundred dollars that I took off Mr. Fenton is marked—and a total of about two hundred taken from you, the dead cockney, Port Light, and the mate—is all marked the same way."

"Ma'ked! How come, ma'ked, Cap'n boss? Ah don't know what you is talk about, at all, no suh!"

"This is what I'm talking about. Mr. Fenton got a little more than two thousand dollars somewhere. And he gave you and the others about two hundred of it, so——"

"Git's what, Cap'n?" demanded the amazed Elephant Joe.

"I said Mr. Fenton got two thousand dollars some——"

"Mah land!" cried Elephant Joe. "He gits so much! And he holds out on us——"

"Go on," urged Stranlow. "You were saying something."

"Ah got no mo' to say, cap'n. Ah don't know what you talks about."

"Oh, yes, you do," said Stranlow. "You talked with Mr. Bentley awhile back, and you had a fairly good idea of what you were talking about. Now, don't try to fool me any more, and——"

"Bentley! That nigger never talked with Bentley!" broke in Fenton weakly. He realized that Elephant Joe was giving away facts which were dangerous.

"Oh, Mr. Fenton has joined our little party," came a voice from the shadows in the corner of the cabin.

It was the voice of Bentley!

Fenton groaned. He knew there must be something wrong with his head, if he thought Bentley, who had warned him against Outridge back in the Kota Balun, could be aboard the *Untong*.

"Maybe a drop of something stimulating would loosen his tongue," went on Bentley's voice.

Fenton moved his head to look into the shadows. As the swinging lamp threw a splash of yellowish light into the corner, it revealed the figure of the big planter, sitting on a transom and smoking a cigar.

Fenton gathered himself to get on his feet. He tried to throw up a hand and steady himself on the bulkhead behind him. But the hand refused to go where Fenton wanted to put it—and he found that his wrists were bound with strong cord.

He gave a muffled cry of sudden fear—and terror. He knew some trap had been sprung, though just how it had been set, he could not fathom at the moment. He fell back again on the cushions of the transom, aghast at what had happened. He was sickened anew by the thought that he was helpless.

"WE DON'T need any information from Mr. Fenton," said Captain Stranlow quietly. "Let him come to, if he likes—but this money of Outridge's from his belt and the pockets of his men, sews up the lot of 'em.

"Besides, there's a charge of piracy in a British vessel that'll hold 'em. As for the money, it's plain that Fenton only gave the others a small part of what he got from Outridge, and kept some eighteen hundred himself, so——"

"Ah tole 'em you never split that money fair!" burst out Elephant Joe, shaking his fist at Fenton. "You calls yo'self a dude! You says as how you plays fair with us boys, that he'ped you fool the Dutchers! And what does I git fo' what I done! Ah goes and gits mahself all hampered up wid these 'ere yaller niggers what strangles mah neck wid fish-net ropes so Ah cain't fight 'em none! Me! Ah thinks Ah'll go and git mahself rich from listenin' at yo' sma't talkin' about how you fools them Dutchers stealin' off'n 'em at that ho-tel, and what does Ah git? Ah gits mahself in jail! Yo' is a sma't white man, Mr. Dude! Yo' ain't so sma't as a baby mud-turtle!"

"Mr. Fenton has been injured. Don't be hard on him," said Stranlow.

"*In*-jured! Does I care? Me, Ah'm ruined! No, suh! Mr. Fenton, Ah don' worry none about you! Look at what Toady gits! He gits his liver blowed off wid a gun! All from listenin' at you talk sma't! Ah wished you was stabbed in so many places the stabs would run together in one big stab, and yo'd be nothin' but a hole in the air aroun' yo'."

"You seem to have a grudge against Mr. Fenton," remarked Stranlow.

"Ah got the grudgiest grudge what anybody could have, Cap'n! What I gits for listenin' at that man? Look at me? Now is the only time Ah got to talk—when I gits in front of that Dutcher judge, he won't know what is mah remarks. Me! Ah thinks Ah's goin' home! What I'll do is be in a Dutcher jail as long Ah fergits me where I comes from—and Ah'll have to do the cheffin' for that sma't man what gits me in it, and if Ah don' pizen him, Ah——"

"Oh, shut up!" broke in a weary voice. It was Phil Jones, where he lay on the deck under Fenton's transom-seat—like a trussed goose. "Nobody wants to hear you talk."

"Ah gits mah say!" retorted Elephant Joe. "Ah is just a fool black man, but Ah got sense enough to know when we is done, if you not. Ah been listenin' at what these gen'lemen says, and Ah knows how down Ah is. Tuck in mah toes, and let me sleep—Ah is a sick coon, and mah comfort is fractured."

"If you don't mind, Captain Stranlow, just what has happened? I've been listening to that crazy black talk, and it means nothing to me," said Fenton.

"You is about ready to git the meanin'," said Elephant Joe. "And what is mo', dude man, it makes you awful sick. Don't you be too hongry for meanin's—you gits a-plenty."

"There's little to explain," said Stranlow. "You men were up the beach, just over the line of Dutch territory. Mr. Hol of the hotel couldn't do much, and didn't want to get in any argument with the British. That morning you were in the bar—Mr. Hol and myself were aware that you were there—we talked about the fifty thousand that had arrived for me in the *Palembang*. It was only a bait—there was no fifty thousand."

"What's that got to do with me?" asked Fenton.

"Nothing much. But we rather think it had a lot to do for us."

"That may be your opinion, but your opinions don't interest me. I've heard a lot of talk about my money, and the money you've taken from these sailors. I don't see the connection at all. You've taken my money out of my pockets, I understand—I'd appreciate it if you'd put it back."

"It isn't your money," said Stranlow.

"That's something you'll have to prove,

or I'll put you in the courts, Captain."

"I think I can prove it, but I'm no hurry about that little detail," said Stranlow.

"All right," said Fenton. "I'm in your hands, it seems. But I don't quite understand what Mr. Bentley's doing here. Just what does it all mean?"

"Simple enough. This vessel was a blackbirder, and was captured by the British. We use it for little cruises out of S'pore these days."

"'We?' Who is 'we,' if I might take the liberty of asking?"

"Myself, Mr. Bentley, and Mr. Outridge."

"Outridge! Oh, so you're in with Outridge, eh? How does that happen?"

"Mr. Outridge is the man you robbed in the Kota Balun."

"*I* robbed him! What are you driving at? You know a Malay boy robbed him."

"I'm not so sure of that. The money you took from Mr. Outridge's belt was—marked. And the money taken from you and your men is the same identical money."

Fenton gave a gasp of startled amazement. For the first time he began to grasp something of just what had happened to him.

"How do you know this is Mr. Outridge's money?"

"Because Mr. Outridge says so himself.—Oh, Outridge! Will you step in from the galley a minute. I want you to meet a friend of yours—a Mr. Fenton, sometimes known as the 'King of the Beachcombers.'"

Outridge appeared in the galley passage, and smiled in at Fenton.

"Hello, there! Thought I was full of Ah Sam's dope, eh, when you lifted my belt. Well, I wasn't, and as my money was marked, and you and your men had it in your clothes, I rather think I can prove it's my money. We'll wait until we get to S'pore, however, to give you all the facts."

"But—but Bentley—said you were a card-sharper," gasped Fenton. "He warned me against you, when——"

"Mr. Bentley didn't warn you enough, I'm afraid," said Outridge. "I hate to criticise my chief, but I was far more dangerous than you supposed."

"Chief?"

"Yes. My. Bentley is an inspector of the Singapore police. Mr. Stranlow—beg your pardon, Skipper—Captain Stranlow is also connected with the police, and I'm an humble employee of the same department."

"Ah craves to ask one question, suh," said Elephant Joe.

"Ask it," said Stranlow.

"Fo' what does I have to go to jail, iffen this Dude Fenton done the stealin'? Ah can't hold his hands while he's away f'om me nights."

"Oh, we haven't any theft charge against you," said Stranlow. "Except, maybe, having stolen money in your possession. The charge against all of you will be piracy—or attempted piracy—on a British vessel. That makes it simpler to hold you—and that's why we waited until you did something aboard here. The crew, you see, are all native police—and well trained to handle any case that arises. Naturally, you had little chance to actually commit piracy in the *Untong*—but you tried hard enough so I think the charge will stand."

There was silence for a few minutes.

"Ah craves to ask one mo' question, suh?"

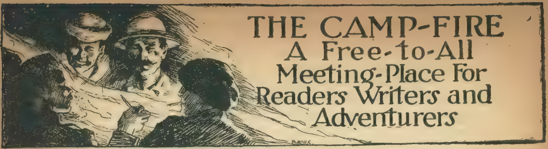
"Ask it."

"This here jail what we're goin' to—is that jail you done got picked out fo' us all, a English jail?"

"British, of course," said Stranlow, with a smile.

"It's not so powerful bad as it might be," went on the big black. "Ah can be happy if folks knows what Ah says—and they can listen at mah singin'. Ah shore been in bad company. But the last thing Ah looks to git jugged fo' is piracy-stuff. No, suh! Ah never intended mahself fo' to be no pirate. No suh! Now Ah gits me some sleep."

And Elephant Joe turned over and fell into slumber.



THE CAMP-FIRE
A Free-to-All Meeting-Place For Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

CAMP-FIRE does go out and hunt them up when they seem to have got lost in the world in general. One of you inquired about Didier Masson, whom he had heard was dead. Here are three comrades replying and one of them expects to produce Didier Masson alive and well, while another is pretty sure Tommy Dean is alive in California.

Miranda, Cuba.

About December, 1913, Masson arrived in Los Mochis, Sinaloa; his plane arrived by military train, at San Blas (Sin.), was switched over on the K C M & O and sent to Topolobampo.

At that time the gunboat *Tampico* was flying the "Constitutionalista" flag—how the *Tampico* crew revolted in Guyamas harbor and brought the boat to Topo is another story.

Shortly after the arrival of the *Tampico* in Topo two of her guns were installed on the mountains commanding the entrance to the port.

Several days later the *Guerrero* and *Morelos*, flying the "Federal" flag, showed up and dropped anchor just off the bar near the entrance of the harbor.

On the large level stretches just behind a low range of mountains Masson had his plane; a better landing or take-off field no one could desire. The first flight was somewhat a surprize to the *Guerrero* and *Morelos* and not a shot was fired as Masson came over the mountains and headed out toward the gunboats.

Three bombs were dropped, one failing to explode, one missing widely its mark, the other splashing water on the *Morelos*. A little later on in the day the *Tampico* steamed out to the entrance of the harbor and a lively exchange of shots occurred but with no damage to either side.

Thereafter for a period of several days early in the morning up would go Masson, but after the first day he was met with a lively fire from the time his plane showed over the mountains. However it was never for more than a few minutes, because as he gained altitude, the guns could not be brought to bear on the plane due to not having elevation sufficient, and in those days anti-aircraft guns were unknown. Usually from 12 to 15 shots were fired.

The second day's practise at bombing resulted in three clean misses, but on the third day the bombs landed uncomfortably close and at the same time a few shots from the 5-inch guns on the mountains caused the *Guerrero* and *Morelos* to up anchor and away. From Topo, Masson went to Hermosillo and later to Nogales. After that we lost track of him until word reached us that he had been shot down in France.

Deane, of whom A B C speaks, we did not know.

While on the subject of war and Mexico perhaps some of the Camp-Fire members will recall "The last trip of the Steamer *Mazatlan*." It was some trip, believe me, and will make interesting reading.—WALLACE MONTGOMERY.

Punta Gorda, Toledo District,
Central America.

A relative of mine residing at Puerto Barrios in Guatemala sent me a copy of *Adventure* for the month of February, 1925. I notice inquiries being made for one Didier Masson, a Frenchman. The episode mentioned by the writer, together with many others relating to his war service on the Western Front in France, I have heard from Masson himself. He was what is known as a "French Ace," and had the Croix de Guerre and I think the Legion of Honor medals, besides other decorations. The writer states he has heard he is dead, and was killed in France. I can assure the inquirer that he is not. I last saw him at Orange Walk in the northern part of this Colony in 1923, and at the present time, to the best of my knowledge, he is engaged commercially in the El Cayo District, i. e.; the Western District.

I am, at the first opportunity, sending this particular copy of your magazine for his information.—I. TAYLOR.

Tucson, Ariz.

This is in answer to A B C's inquiry about Didier Masson and Tommy Dean. I knew them both from the time Gen. Pesqueira (then acting governor of Sonora) brought them to Mexico, together with the Curtis biplane, which had to be smuggled across the line.

THE bombs mentioned were the invention of Dean, who lost the part of one finger in his experimenting. Tommy Dean was a cracker-jack aeroplane mechanic and had never done any flying previous to General Obregon's besieging Guaymas. That plane was very different from those used today. It had two seats rigged in front of the wings, with nothing in front to break the wind, and in fact nothing underneath them but a sort of basket seat and a narrow foot-rest. The operator sure had an unobstructed view, by leaning over a little one could see under the plane. One day Masson asked Dean to get in the other seat, lean over and watch to see if the bombs struck anything while he taxied down the field, before Dean realized what had happened he was up in the air. After that he flew regularly with Masson.

HAVING no protection from the wind and it being before the days of special clothing, they bundled themselves up in whatever clothing they had. On the day mentioned when they had to make their forced landing at Empalme and with Gen. Ojeda coming out of Guaymas with a train full of soldiers to take them prisoners, Dean stopped at the plane long enough to break and tear away his gas-controls, trying to leave the machine in such shape that Gen. Ojeda could not use it. Then they both beat it for their camp some 12 or 14 kilometers away, shedding their extra clothing as they went. Both of them expected Gen. Ojeda would shoot them if they were caught, so discarded their clothing regardless. Dean had spent some four or five hundred dollars for repair parts, etc., and the vouchers for this money were in his coat that he threw away to get in good running shape. He told me afterward that he had a dickens of a time collecting this money, as acting Governor Randall at first refused to reimburse him because he could not produce the vouchers. Well, they kept going until they ran into Col. Trujillo with a troop of cavalry who came to their rescue. By the way, Col. Trujillo lost one man in this rescue. The Mexican who told me about it said the poor fellow stuck his head out just in time to have it carried away by a cannon-ball.

After they met Col. Trujillo they went back over the way they had just come. They discovered several barbed wire fences they had passed, but neither could remember if they had gone through or over them, the surprizing fact to them both was that neither had torn his clothes.

AFTER Gen. Ojeda was forced to evacuate Guaymas they continued with Gen. Obregon on his march via Mazatlan that finally wound up in Mexico City. Masson became fed up with his job and resigned, coming back to Hermosillo where he embarked in the commision business. When the war broke out in Europe, he went to France, serving first in the infantry. Later he was transferred to the air service and I am told was one of the organizers of the Lafayette Squadron. Subsequently he was ordered to the United States, I believe as an instructor at one of our Aviation Camps. They tell me he was killed through some accident while flying at one of our Camps. Masson learned to fly in France where he was known as the "Rubber-man" on account of the various spills he had while learning to fly.

Tommy Dean stayed with the Mexican Army for some time. He was in charge of their planes at Mexico City under a Col. Salinas (who was also a flyer and a nephew of Gen. Carranza). Later he quit, came to the States and got married. He went to San Francisco, took his examination and got his license as an air pilot; when the United States went into the War he was foreman of an Aeroplane factory in either Rhode Island or New Jersey; I do not remember which State it was but I have the impression that he worked in both States. I know he built planes for our Government all during the War. I have not heard from him for several years, but believe him to be still alive. He had a brother in California and I think his father also lives there. He introduced me to him in Nogales and he was then on his way to California.

Dean was a British subject and was born, I think, in New Zealand. He is probably an American citizen by this time.—F. E. STEVENS.

A SOLDIER of fortune par excellence, Sam Dreben, is dead and Camp-Fire stands to salute him and wish him God-speed over the Last Trail.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Camp-Fire: For the benefit of a pessimistic few who seem inclined to believe that Adventure and Romance is dead, I am enclosing a clipping from a coast newspaper announcing the death of Sam Dreben, the "Fighting Jew," whose career as adventurer and soldier of fortune makes all others seem tame by comparison.—L. T. ROSENVALL.

HOLLYWOOD, Calif., March 16.—(AP)—Fearless Sam Dreben, internationally known for his dare-deviltries on a score of battlefields; American World War hero, and soldier of fortune in a dozen revolutions; filibusterer with Villa and friend of Pershing, will be buried today.

LOS ANGELES, March 16.—(US)—there died here yesterday, a most famous border character of recent years—Sam Dreben, the "Fighting Jew."

A heart overstrained by adventures such as few men meet gave way and Dreben died suddenly, as he would have chosen, leaving a name for quiet courage unexcelled in the annals of the southwest.

Although the "Fighting Jew" was but 47, he had packed into those years enough of danger and romance to cover a score of lifetimes. Intimate of Pancho Villa, companion of Lee Christmas and Tracey Richardson and chief of scouts for Pershing in Texas, Dreben's name, on both sides of the line, was one with which to conjure. He carried Uncle Sam's musket in the Boxer rebellion, the Spanish-American war and the Philippine insurrection, earning the reputation of a remarkable soldier.

And in the World War he ran true to form. As top sergeant in the 36th (Texas division) he received the accolade from General Pershing of being "one of the bravest men in the American army."

It was for capturing a machine gun nest and killing 14 Germans singlehanded, that he received the distinguished Service Cross, the Croix de Guerre and the Military medal.

Dreben made a considerable fortune at one time in Mexican mining properties. His intimate acquaintance with the country, acquired while he served on a machine gun for Villa and acted as his sub-purchasing agent, afforded him an opportunity to capitalize his knowledge when the border became semi-pacified. He was said to be the only American ever really trusted by the picturesque Mexican chieftain.

But money meant little to him and his modest competence was dissipated during several years of semi-retirement at El Paso. He was an insurance salesman in Los Angeles at the time of his death.

Dreben's last exploit was his attemped capture of "little Phil" Alguin, notorious Los Angeles desperado who was in hiding in Juarez. In company with Louis Oaks, then chief of police of Los Angeles, he headed an expedition to kidnap Alguin, wanted for murder, and bring him to the American side. Alguin was captured but a riot ensued before they could hurry him across the line and the American party had difficulty in escaping with their lives.

WOULDN'T you know that he'd be only a top sergeant in our hurriedly built A. E. F.? Quite possibly they started this experienced soldier as a private, and quite possibly those who started him had never even heard a shot fired in anger. His friend Tracey Richardson, heaven knows, had a hard enough time getting even elementary recognition of his military experience even after he'd added commissioned service with the Canadians in the World War to his already strong record, with a commission as colonel or lieutenant-colonel waiting for him in Canada if he couldn't make his own country let him serve her as he was qualified to serve. He made a fight for it and at last forced them to give him an examination the result of which compelled them to give him what was his due.

And two other comrades, commissioned officers in the British flying corps, both with service at the front and one with three or four German planes to his official credit—when we went into the war they came back to serve their own country, and were they allowed to? Neither one could get a job as pilot or observer, despite their credentials. Turned down by men who'd never even seen war and who couldn't do even elementary flying. Jealousy, I suppose, or red tape carried to the point of utter madness—at a time when this country had practically *no* aviators with anything like the experience needed at the front. One pompous fool on Long Island finally allowed one of these two Camp-Fire comrades to go up with him and be tested out. But the tester didn't know enough flying to do even his own part—our comrade had to "take the stick and bring the buss to the ground." So they offered him a ground job. And he went elsewhere, his then invaluable experience lost to his country.

At bottom it's the same kind of pettiness, red tape, bureaucracy, jealousy, politics and utter lack of patriotism and horse-sense that showed so often in the proceedings that resulted in the removal of General Mitchell from his place in our air force.

A BIT out of a letter from Tom L. Mills of "Ask Adventure" concerning one of our Camp-Fire buttons:

Feilding, New Zealand.

. . . That same adventurer told me that when he was touring to Wild West (and wet) Coast of New Zealand's South Island (where the coal and gold come from) an old man slapt him on the shoulder, pointed to the *Adventure* button and exclaimed:

"I'm one of them! Come and have a drink with me!"

And they had several, talking the while of "Camp-Fire" and *Adventure* writers.—TOM L. MILLS.

AS TO why cow-punchers don't eat. In connection with his story in this issue Walter J. Coburn, speaking from experience, tells us something about their little ways in real life lest some of us think he was careless in his fiction:

Carmel, Calif.

To them that ain't Longhorns: Mebbeso some of you, reading "Paid Off," thinks "That *Tad* and *Shorty* couple sure miss a lot of meals. Why don't they pack a lunch along?"

Put the question to some white-haired old cow-waddie and watch him grin, slow like, and shake his head.

"Lunch packin' goes fer sheep-herders," he'll tell you. "A cow puncher'll piece out on crick water and a cigaret. Fer why? Darned if I know, son. He figgers it's sorter weak-like to pack a lunch. In a tight, he might have a handfull uh jerkie in his pocket. No more."

I'VE ridden day after day, week after week, from daylight till dark without my noonday meal. Pulling bog, riding fence, hunting horses, etc. This is during the seasons between round-ups, *sabe*. Round-up time brings a man close to the mess-wagon at noon time. Not because the captain wants to throw grub into his men, but because the round-up ground is naturally close to camp where the beef herd is held.

No, folks, a cow-puncher won't pack a lunch no more than he'll put on a slicker until he's darn sure the rain's plumb wet and is going to hang on for a few hours. I've seen half a dozen cow-punchers, all with a slicker tied to their saddles, get soaked while they waited for one of the bunch to weaken and untie that water-shedder from his hull. Why? *Quien sabe?*

Therefore, friends, don't jump my frame for not feeding my heroes regular. They're the breed of humans that'd walk two miles to catch a horse in order to ride half a mile. Cow-puncher pride, I reckon you'd call it if you are tolerant. There's them that might have harsher terms for it.—WALTER J. COBURN.

FROM Leonard H. Nason some facts concerning the history back of his serial beginning in this issue. Old soldiers, if they have not already run across it, will be interested in the seven-year record of Ligonier's Regiment of Horse.

In this story Mr. Nason takes up what is for him an entirely new line. I've already warned you that his field is not limited to the war and the sea.

The journal of Hugh Bancroft, a trooper in Ligonier's Regiment of Horse, begins somewhat abruptly at the battle of Dettingen, June, 1743. This battle, strangely enough, took place between two nations, the French and the English, who were not at war with each other.

THE Emperor Charles VI of Austria died in 1740, leaving but one child, a daughter, Maria Theresa. The elector of Bavaria, a cousin, claimed the throne of Austria, and was supported by Frederick II of Prussia. The French were allies of the Prussians, and in this capacity encountered British troops who were supporting the claims of Maria against all comers. The battle of Dettingen was the only one of the campaign of 1743, and war was not declared between France and England until the following March.

Ligonier's Regiment had an exceptional history. In seven years of war they never lost a man or horse to the enemy, never had officer or man tried by general courtmartial, had thirty-five troopers commissioned from the ranks, and lost only seven men by disease. It can be seen from this record that Ligonier's troopers were exceptional men and it is therefore not remarkable that a man of *Hugh Bancroft's* education and antecedents should be serving as a common soldier in the ranks of such a regiment.—"Steamer" (LEONARD H. NASON).

TO THOSE who do not know our magazine or the type of people who gather at our Camp-Fire it would probably be a great surprize that an argument concerning the character of Julius Cæsar, started by Talbot Mundy at one meeting, pretty well occupied another full meeting, comes up again in force at this one and may very well continue at future ones.

The following editorial from the Brocton (Mass.) *Times*, restating part of Mr. Mundy's theories, is a good opener for the present session.

Talbot Mundy, who has some reputation as a writer of historical fiction, has a story dealing with Julius Cæsar in a recent number of *Adventure* in which he gives a different impression of the great Roman than that usually current, and says regarding it:

"In the first place, I don't believe he wrote his Commentaries. Many commentators agree with him on that point. His secretary did. Most of it is in the third person, but here and there the first person creeps in, showing where Cæsar edited the copy, which was afterward, no doubt, transcribed by a slave who did not dare to do any re-editing.

"The statement is frequently made that Cæsar must be accurate, because all other Roman historians agree with him. But they all copied from him, so that argument doesn't stand. No man who does his own press-agenting is entitled to be accepted on his own bare word, and as Cæsar was quite an extraordinary criminal along every line but one (he does not seem to have been a drunkard) he is even less entitled to be believed than are most press agents. He was an epileptic, whose fits increased in violence as he grew older, and he was addicted to every form of vice (except drunkenness) then known. He habitually used the plunder of conquered cities for the purpose of bribing the Roman senate; he cut off the right hands of 50,000 Gauls on one occasion, as a mere act of retaliation; he broke his word as often and as treacherously, as he saw fit; and he was so vain that he ordered himself deified and caused his image to be set in Roman temples, with a special set of priests to burn incense before it."

Most of what he writes of Cæsar is true; the greater part of it may be found in Suetonius. But Plutarch has been followed rather than Suetonius, and, as it has been said that the English people take their history from Shakespeare and their religion from Milton, so Shakespeare's magnification of the Roman's character has impressed the popular imagination.

Yet, despite his many faults, Cæsar was the greatest Roman of them all, and should be judged by what he accomplished rather than by any merit or demerit in his personal character.

ONE from L. S. Hughes. As to my "aiding, etc.," I refer him to a more careful reading of my original statements:

Moundsville, West Virginia.

I write because I feel that you are unconsciously aiding in a piece of mischievous iconoclasm. I refer to the *Tros* stories.

Recently I had to prepare a paper on the myths of history and, while I deplored racial and national myths, I defended personal legends of excellence because they furnished inspiration.

I feel that there is no question that our belief in the magnanimity and greatness of any one is beneficial, and that our modern tendency to sneer, to belittle and to deny the good in famous men militates against nobility.

Do you find nothing helpful in the tale, apparently authentic, that Cæsar ordered all enemy correspondence in the camp at Pharsalia burned unread on the ground that he did not wish to know his enemies? It is probable that this cost him his life.

Consider, also, that after he had shattered the Senatorial power there was no proscription. Contrast this with Sulla and others who proceeded him. If my memory serves, Sulla proscribed some hundreds of senators and sixteen hundred equites in one document.

Even Anthon who bitterly assailed Cæsar (see "Anthon's Classical Dictionary"), did so only on the ground that he overthrew the liberties of Rome and was ambitious. As to the former charge I think we can agree that he was mistaken, as the liberties had been gone for a century.

SOME of the author's remarks are truly extraordinary, such as the one denying Cæsar's authorship of the "Commentaries" on the argument that they are both the third and the first person. To any one who has read much Latin this approaches the ridiculous for the two persons were used much as they are today in French. We know that Aulus Hirtius wrote the latter books, it is generally believed from Cæsar's notes.

One thing is very certain; the books were written by a great soldier (Hirtius was one), for they form even today a practical manual of the art of war. Do secretaries have the insight into strategy and tactics of a Master of War?

Lechery is a favorite charge against any great man. It has been made against many, among them Washington and Napoleon. It was made even against Jeanne D'Arc (consider that).

The charge is greatly weakened by being extended by the author to the Roman troops in general. Here we have a definite and exact commentator who was a Jew and a high-priest of the Jews. Josephus gives in great detail the actions of the Romans in camp, on the march, in battle and siege and, lastly, in the storm of a city. He does not mention that a single woman was molested. Is not this worth notice?

I do not pretend that the Romans or Cæsar were purists by any manner of means but gross animalism is not compatible with good soldiership and they were the best of soldiers.

THE "Commentaries" to any student of the art of war are a strangely modest book. Where disaster occurred it is clearly recorded and the reasons are given. For instance, Cæsar says distinctly that when in the territory of the Belgae he held his forces in camp awaiting a favorable opportunity because the "test skirmishes" resulted unfavorably.

A curious error is found in regard to the word "Barbarian." This carried no stigma whatsoever and meant only those who spoke another tongue than Latin. The word is from the Greek *Barbaroi*, an imitative invention indicating meaningless sounds. And, by the way, Cæsar rarely uses it in regard to the Gauls. He spoke Celtic and so understood most of the tribes. He does use it in connection with the tribes of Brittany.

ONE more point I shall try to make before I ask for a bit of information and close. The scene of the fight at the landing is entirely beyond possibility. Cæsar's vivid description has only been touched by one writer, the younger Arnold, who has redone it excellently. The Romans lost few men and the Aquilarius of the Tenth Legion whom Mr. Mundy makes a swaggering, grinning brute (but who has fired tens of thousands with the memory of his noble cry) was not killed. Few men were lost, because the legionary's armor was not heavy; all equipment and pack amounting to seventy pounds; and because the pila hurled from the ships could clear the landing for a sufficient distance.

I shall be greatly obliged if you will give me the citation of Cæsar's alleged cutting off of sword-hands, giving book, chapter and the edition in which it occurs. It is not in my "De Bello Gallico" and Anthon, who was a great classicist, does not mention it in his indictment of Cæsar.

I would suggest that, if you want a fair picture of the Romans, you read Josephus. He had no cause to love them.

I have touched only a very few points of the many which might be criticized in the story and in the author's letter, because I wish to prevent harm: not to find fault.—L. S. HUGHES.

P.S.—Admiral Mahan, who was competent, highly admires the Roman navy (See: "The Influence of Sea Power on History.")—L. S. H.

NOW this one from Hugh Pendexter. I hate to publish it because it's going to make him so many bitter enemies. I can just see the abusive letters pouring in upon him. The insolence of the man! The ignorance! A dangerous character and doubtless a Bolshevik, an atheist and a downright criminal at heart. How about a lynching party, or at least some tar and feathers? Iroquois indeed! Ridiculous! Why, he hasn't any respect for anything! Sounds as if he'd been off somewhere in a corner thinking. A very dangerous habit. Exterminate him! He's a menace to all our oldest and most cherished ideas that we got from—oh well, it doesn't matter where we got 'em from or how. They're ours and it's impudent and criminal for him to have any opinions that don't agree with them.

Again I add my N. B. to the hastily minded, to wit: I do not endorse or attack Mr. Pendexter's opinions, but merely listen to them with decency and respect for another man's opinion, hoping that they may broaden my point of view and stimulate me into doing some thinking of my own. The same course and attitude are respectfully but not too hopefully recommended to you of the hasty minds.

Norway, Maine.

Cæsar's reputation is based, primarily, on his own reports. Somewhat similar to a newspaper account of a fight I had had, say, with a deaf-mute, who couldn't express himself even in the sign-language. In such an event my opponent would stand a fat chance so far as reputation goes. I've been warned that if I say Cæsar never originated a military maneuver I'd have to back up the assertion or have a dozen "on my neck." As it would be difficult to make a man prove such a negative statement I'll put it this way: What military maneuver did he originate?

AS SCHOOLBOYS we learned that the Spartans originated the phalanx. Also, that Rameses the Great, seventeen centuries before Christ, was the first man recorded by authentic history to collect, discipline and maneuver large bodies of men as an "army." Egypt, consequently, was first to lead in the art of making war. The army depended upon its archers, afoot, in chariots, and, in a lesser degree, cavalry. The regiments were early divided into battalions and companies. A phalanx of twelve men deep was used. They were directed by trumpet and drum. Professor John Lord states that in defensive and offensive warfare, in discipline and construction of military engines, their work was scarcely improved upon by Greeks or Romans, or even by Europeans in the Middle Ages. The Spartan phalanx was eight men deep. Philip of Macedon made it sixteen men deep, and it was he who introduced the large oval buckler and a heavier spear. The spears were twenty-four feet long, projecting eighteen feet beyond the front. It was Philip who adopted the policy of standing armies to replace militia. He borrowed from Epaminondas of Thebes the idea of forming columns upon a front less than the depth and applied it to the cavalry. Napoleon used the same tactics in his Italian campaign against the Austrians.

THE Roman soldier at his best was developed by centuries of effort. Until the year 107 B.C. only those strongly attached to the Republic could serve in the army. The ten legions Cæsar used in subduing Gaul were not of Italian origin. What new science, or trick, or tactics, did he bring to the battlefield? He fought a primitive people and was helped along to success because they were "divided into three parts."

Anthony Wayne, equally strong in men and *similarly armed*, would have gone through Caesar's legions like the Center College eleven through a squad of one-legged mendicants. Wayne was a super-drill master, and never did a brigadier plan an assault more carefully, or take greater risks. Lee and his generals would have run circles around Cæsar's army. Stonewall Jackson and his two-footed "cavalry" would have him whipped on front and flanks before Cæsar knew what was happening to him. Grant would have broken his neck. Froude and others have whitewashed and calcimined Cæsar and tooted his horn so loudly, and other historians have followed suit in a lesser degree so persistently, that the name of "Cæsar" for centuries has been a fetich. Much of it is "bunk" pure and simple.

In Cæsar's time the armies were filling up with mercenaries; and no army can be great, *per se*, that will sell itself to the highest bidder. Imagine such fighting material stacking up against the spirit of America as shown at Bunker Hill and, more notably, at Valley Forge!

THE Iroquois conquered as much, if not more country, than did Rome. The highest estimate of the Iroquois forces is 4,500 men. Seldom if ever did so many of the Five Nations take the field. From Maine to the Black Hills in South Dakota, as far south as the Tennessee River, they imposed their will. And the most wonderful part of it is that they had peace inside the League. Whether a people were exterminated, or absorbed, there was peace. They won no victories by bribing traitors. They lost no peace by traitors. Their Federal confederacy is the model after which our republic, wittingly or otherwise, was formed. When the warriors took a red path there was no intrigue and double-crossing back home. I maintain that the Iroquois plane of culture and "civilization" was far superior to that of the Roman Empire, which bred imbecile rulers and apparently *liked* them that way. There was an Idea back of the Iroquois league which is not found in the topsy-turvy centuries of treachery and political graft and intrigue which characterized the Empire.

AS AN example of the wrong way to do it, Rome is entitled to a place in our school histories. But let's have done with parroting of eulogies and encomiums. Let's teach the youngsters that no nation without national ideals for wholesale betterment can live. Let's not perpetuate the tradition that one must lead off with Cæsar in naming the greatest of military heroes. Let's anticipate the time when children will be taught to name Washington, Lee, Grant, and their famous brigadiers. When Cæsar won at Thapsus, Africa, and lost only fifty men while slaying ten thousand he won no great military victory. He just happened upon a soft thing, a set-up. At Petra, in 48 B.C. Pompeius had Cæsar "spiled" for all time, but paused to celebrate and let him get away.

And why not tell the youngsters, when they read about the Appian Way, that the Inca under greater difficulties built as good, probably better, roads?

Also that the Iroquois were greater military leaders, far superior as rulers and, along with other red nations, produced as great orators. As organizers either Pontiac or Tecumseh had it over Cæsar, *et als*, like Ringling Brothers' ten. Had Cæsar's cohorts brought a fight to the home of the Iroquois (the cohorts) would have died in their harness. With all best wishes and for the truth, in so far as we can get it, about the original Vice Kid.—Hugh Pen.

ONE from H. G. Patterson, who, while he does not agree with Mr. Mundy on various scores, is not in the habit of swallowing accepted history whole and without doing some thinking and investigating of his own.

Russellville, Tennessee.

The editor and Talbot Mundy deliver a rather free discourse on the unreliability of accepted History with a big H. I imagine Pendexter and Lamb would agree with you. Since I was convinced long before, I suppose we can call in unanimous.

There is one thing however, that we must not overlook in the matter. If we go to our children with all our doubts, various views and contradictions, they would probably not get started on *any* history, so I believe we have to work that study just like we would orthodox religion; get them oriented properly, rouse their interest, then they can look up the loose threads themselves.

I DO not know where Mundy gets his material about Julius Cæsar. Cæsar has never been a special study of mine, not from lack of interest, but because my line of research jumps beyond that time and we can not take in too much territory. However, there are some things about Cæsar which came into my studies as a by-product.

1. I do not believe he slew three million men in battle or anything like it. That was about the extent of the entire Gallo-Belgic population.

2. For some reason and possibly correct, he is rated a military man of the first class, but I can not find any record of his ever being in a man's-size pitched battle (military history is part of my line). Pharsalia was big only in results, with Pompey dead on his feet and his soldiers fighting as a swarm and not in large units. So far as any one knows for certain, the Gauls seemed to fight only as mobs.

3. I don't think Cæsar ever regarded himself in the light we shine on him, although he considered himself first in Rome. Later propaganda gave him the hoist. How come?

He was the starting point of the Emperors of old Rome hence, the greater Julius Cæsar was, that much greater was their reflected glory. Later came Constantine and the Popes, Christian, but deriving their worldly authority by inheritance from Julius Cæsar. Then came the Holy Roman Empire, Charlemagne, Otto, Frederic Barbarossa, Charles Fifth, innumerable Popes (religion and government were synonymous), all claiming inherited authority from Julius Cæsar. Just think of fifteen hundred years of propaganda from Emperor and Pope; they might fight each other's authority but never inherited authority of Julius Cæsar.

4. In regard to Cæsar's treatment of captives and women especially, it was only the custom of the times, neither better nor worse than the others.

"TROS of Samothrace" and a "secret knowledge" in general. I was in hopes when I "faced the East" that there might be an inner knowledge among some people but I did not find it, although what I found might be of use with information from a separate source.

The Yogi philosophy is an interesting study along that line but it is hard for a beginner to distinguish the *bona fide* teaching of old days from the trash injected by orthodoxy in later centuries; and after you may have learned that much you can not talk to anybody about it, for they either take you for a time waster or, what is more probable, a D.-F.—H. G. Patterson.

FROM Arthur D. Howden Smith of our writers' brigade, who, as you know, has delved pretty extensively into ancient history:

Babylon, Long Island.

As for Cæsar, my mind's wide open. I consider Mundy overdoes what a lawyer would call a good case. Cæsar *was* cruel, selfish and epileptic: he was lustful, he may have been a degenerate (in this connection, remember the Roman biographers were often partisan; likewise, the world had different moral standards then—Jesus Christ drank and enjoyed alcohol!). But he was a great man. Mundy sneers at his luck. Well, one lesson I've learned in my life is that no man succeeds continually by luck. Once in a while, yes. But not always. Cæsar was a consummate soldier, if nothing else, and he seems to have envisaged the world state which Rome ultimately became.

AND this brings me to the most unsound of Mundy's animadversions in his Camp-Fire note: his wholesale denunciation of Rome. It sounds like the round condemnations of everything German we used to get several years ago. I call it ridiculous by its lack of restraint. Rome wrought evil, yes. It also wrought good. Despite the peculiar failings of Romans as individuals and as a people, the world actually progressed under the Empire and the best evidence of that is the utter failure of civil forces which followed the Empire's collapse.

Mind you, I'm not going to make Mundy's mistake and give Rome a clean slate. But let me suggest that any fair-minded man do this: Read up on the history of any of the empires preceding Rome or contemporaneous with Rome. Then say whether the world would have done better, given all the circumstances of the times, the state of human society, the extent of human knowledge, under any other known power. Carthage? No. The Hellenistic empires in Asia Minor and Egypt? No. The Persian or other Asiatic monarchies? No. The Greeks? I don't think so. In recent years we have learned more about the utter depravity of the Greek decadence, a decadence much more sinister than that of Rome, certainly in Cæsar's time.

THE charge of materialism falls of its own weight. Unfortunately, the great majority of people in this world can only be swayed by materialism. We have to work with the tools available. So did the Romans. What's more, they didn't turn the world into materialistic channels. It was there already. And another thing, there's a lot of bunk about mysteries; of course, its perfectly fair for Mundy to exploit 'em for story-purposes, but he's simply using his imagination when he hooks up Druids with Samothrace, etc. The mystery which really became worldwide was the Mithraic, and that was a religion, as well as a mystery, with a special appeal to men. None of those old mysteries, with a *wide* appeal, reckoned on women to any extent—which is an indication of their essential limitation. (I underscore "wide" to save myself from being jumped on because of the lewd Greek mysticism which never reached western Europe.)

TO SUM up. If there is any Great Plan in this universe of ours, it is manifest that Rome had a definite part in it. For Rome laid the groundwork of the world we know, and, personally, however dissatisfied I am with this world, I refuse to believe it should be scrapped for its shortcomings. The chart of human endeavors shows a steady upcurve from the first glint of reason amongst the Stone Age folk; occasionally it dips down for a generation or an eon. But it always climbs up again. And its progress upward was as steady under Rome's dominion as in any other prolonged period. Men had much to wish for, as we have, but they were, as a whole, better off than they had been. If there were few great thinkers, education was more widely dispersed than it had ever been, so widely dispersed that it was able to survive the Dark Ages and the jealous ignorance of the early Christian priests. No, I wouldn't say Rome thwarted human progress or aborted man's happiness.—ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH.

MR. SMITH'S letter was one of the first sent on to Mr. Mundy, so that the latter might have his chance to answer in rebuttal, and elicited a direct reply. Mr. Mundy will be given opportunity later to make general blanket reply in defense of his theories. Meanwhile his reply to Mr. Smith is given here. After reading it you will at least credit him with having done a great deal of research before forming opinions of his own. I wonder whether all who attack his views have done as much.

Point Loma, California.

The difficulty of answering Mr. Smith lies chiefly in the fact that he offers me so many openings. However, to begin with Cæsar's luck: I am accused of sneering at it. Cæsar boasted of it so incessantly that one can't rightly ignore it. All the world in Cæsar's day regarded him as "lucky," and undoubtedly he was; whoever opposed him had to take that luck of his into consideration, and for *Tros* to have disregarded it, or not to have discussed it when advising those who had to resist Cæsar's invasion, would have been simply foolish. I believe that nowhere, either in these *Tros* stories or in Camp-Fire, have I even hinted that Cæsar was not a man of marvelous ability, although he made some incredibly crass mistakes of judgment, as for instance with his fleet.

DID Cæsar envisage a world state? I doubt it. His own excuse, that he gave for invading Britain, was that he wanted pearls to make a breastplate for the Venus Genetrix in Rome. One account describes him, when in Spain, as weeping because, although in early middle life, he had not yet begun to emulate Alexander, who conquered the world in his youth. He was murdered mainly to prevent his project of invading Asia, for which he was preparing unheard of armaments with the aid of Cleopatra's money. Cleopatra was in Rome at the time of his death; she was occupying his trans-Tiberene villa; and although Cæsar was living with his own Roman wife at the time, he already had a son by Cleopatra, and there is at least good ground for believing he intended to make Cleopatra empress of the world—*i.e.* that she should share his throne.

EPILEPSY does not make high character. Ask any doctor. Immorality, of the type that Cæsar practised, wholly undermines sanity. Any one who doubts this should consult the medical officers of a few lunatic asylums. It is quite true that Roman historians were addicted to reporting malicious scandal, and that a very great deal of what they wrote, either for or against any well known individual, will not bear scrutiny. But even Baring-Gould, Cæsar's stoutest advocate, has to admit that Cæsar was sexually vicious, even after making all possible discounts for gossip and the accepted standards of his generation.

IT WAS Octavian (Augustus) who visualized the Roman Empire, really founded it, and made its survival for several centuries possible. Julius Cæsar was an intellectual giant, a prodigious cynic, a genius, if you like the term, who saw the possibility of making himself master of the world, and who knew that nine-tenths, at least, of the men opposed to him were fools. He was an expert in psychology and perfectly understood the trick of magnanimity, never being cruel for the sake of cruelty itself but preferring to be spectacularly generous. To use his own phrase, he "punished ill-will, not the deed;" but on the other hand, he was not particularly fond of referring to the sixty thousand Gauls a year whom he sold into slavery in order to accumulate money for his campaigns and defray his personal debts. He was the most extravagant wastrel of other people's money of whom we have any record.

Cæsar was beyond all doubt a genius. He recognized himself as such and had such a perfect contempt for men of lesser intellectuality that, for instance, when one of his generals deserted to Pompey's side at the beginning of the Civil War, he sent the man's baggage after him. He despised Pompey—understood his weakness of character perfectly—gave him all the time he wanted in which to undermine his own position—and then smashed him.

THE commonest mistake made in connection with Roman history is to suppose that Cæsar founded the Roman Empire. He did nothing of the kind. Prior to his day, and until his death, Rome was an abominable welter of vulgarity, corruption, murder, rioting, malaria, chicanery and vice. There was not one admirable feature in its government, which amounted to nothing else than mob law. The condition lent itself to Cæsarism (the word exactly describes what Cæsar had in mind and what he did). He had the genius to recognize his opportunity, and the strength of personality to put his will into reffect. But would a genuine hero have built to himself a temple in Rome—deified himself—have appointed priests to sacrifice to him—have coined the famous "*veni, vidi, vici*" phrase after a victory that was insignificant compared to many he had won? Would he have executed Vercingetorix? Would he have out-corrupted, as Cæsar admittedly did, even the election-riggers of his generation? Such a man was not in the same class with Washington or Lincoln, nor even with Napoleon Bonaparte.

MR. SMITH'S assertion that "the charge of materialism (against Rome) falls of its own weight" simply takes my breath away. Has he accepted the cut-and-dried judgment of the text-books that were inflicted on us when he and I were boys at school? Prior to Octavian (the Emperor Augustus) Rome's politics, religion, aims and methods were so utterly swinish that the closest search discovers no trace of anything except materialism. That is a tall statement, I admit; but let some one produce evidence to the contrary. Remember: the pigs can be brave. I say nothing against the bravery of a certain class of Roman soldiers.

Certainly Rome did not invent materialism, but by Cæsar's time she had raised it to a policy, which Cæsar carried to the *n*th degree. Octavian (Augustus) foresaw, founded, disciplined and schooled the Roman Empire; and in doing so he, and Tiberius after him, incorporated into it what finally killed Rome herself. Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines strove almost as mightily as he did to purge the materialism that they recognized and loathed. But it was Augustus' treatment of the provinces that made decent living possible outside of Rome, with the result that the great majority of statesmen, artists, poets, legislators after his day were foreign born. Rome's civilization was in the provinces, which throve in spite of her, and finally destroyed the Roman system.

CARTHAGE may have been no better than Rome, but we have to trust to Roman historians for accounts of Carthage. Do we accept, say, Mr. Creel's account of Germany—or the Bolshevic Government's official valuation of the ethics and condition of the United States? Greece produced Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Æschylus and others; but she failed them, and she fell when she ignored her teachers. The higher they rise the harder they fall, and Greece has not recovered yet. Of Persia, as a contemporary of Rome, we have not much record except such as was written by her enemies; however, she was sufficiently virile to defeat Rome repeatedly and thoroughly, and from the treatment that Crassus received we may judge that even the Parthians despised Rome's lust for money.

Of India rather more is known. There was a constant flow of pilgrims into India to study at the feet of India's philosophers. Out of India came Buddhism, which carried peace, the arts, kindliness and spiritual thinking; it survived a great deal longer than did Rome's iron rule. China's civilization, so much higher than Rome's that no comparison is possible, endured for two thousand years, based on the teachings of Lao Tse, Confucius and Buddha. The first and the last taught spiritual thinking positively, the second implicitly, and the three became blended into one philosophy whose results exceeded anything that later history can show.

TO SAY, as Mr. Smith does, that "the great majority of the people in this world can only be swayed by materialism" is stark nonsense. Lao Tse, Confucius and Buddha swayed four hundred millions of Chinese. The Gautama Buddha's teaching spread from end to end of Asia and changed it out of recognition; it survives today as a living force in the world; it was the basis of the original Christian teachings. Jesus Christ (whom Mr. Smith compares with Cæsar) was surely hardly a materialist, yet not without a certain influence.

If anything is clear to one who really studies history (instead of parroting the jargon of the politicians' text-books) it is that civilization declines into savagery exactly in proportion to the inroads of materialism; and that savagery yields to civilization only in response to spiritual impulse. The decadence of art, the beginnings and the progression of anarchy, the degradation of morals, the increase of cruelty can in every instance be traced to the acceptance of material standards—generally noticeable first in the increasing craving after wealth. No savagery can be found anywhere in the world (remnants of the stone-age not excluded) that does not show unquestionable traces of an antecedent civilization. The course of history runs in cycles, descending as spirituality lessens and materiality increases, then in course of time ascending out of materiality into another "golden age."

MR. SMITH is totally at sea about the Mysteries. By the time of Pythagoras (who was taught in India) the Mysteries had ceased to exercise much outward influence on the world; they had become popular, with the result that their interpretation had been vulgarized and very few remained whose character enabled them to penetrate to the higher degrees and the inner teachings. The school of Pythagoras was an effort to stem the advancing tide of materialism that culminated in the debauch of Rome, just as Neo-Pythagoreanism, Neo-Platonism, Stoicism (and even Epicureanism) were efforts of the same sort made in Rome herself. But they were efforts, none the less, from outside Rome, not due to her own genius but aimed against her materialism.

Mr. Smith refers to Mithraism (which, by the way, ran a very close race with Christianity) as having been "a religion as well as a mystery." Does he suppose the other, vastly higher Mysteries were not religious? They were wholly so. It was when their followers attempted to materialize them, mainly along the line of adopting them as state religions, that they fell on evil days and almost, but not quite, vanished from the earth. That they did not "reckon on women to any extent" (to quote Mr. Smith again) is totally untrue—as untrue as that Freemasonry does not "reckon on women," although it does not admit women to membership and for perfectly valid reasons that have nothing to do with women's fitness or unfitness for spirituality. Mithraism with its blood-rites was by far the most materialistic of all the Mysteries; hence its popularity, and hence its disappearance in competition with Christianity, which did not permit blood-rites in theory (though its record, due to materialistic interpretation of the teachings, has been the bloodiest of all, not one excluded).

IT WOULD be interesting to know just where Mr. Smith obtained his information about the Druids, and why he thinks I relied only on my imagination when I linked them up with Samothrace. Even in the days of Pythagoras the outward influence of Samothrace had begun to wane, but things are not invariably what they seem. If Mr. Smith, or any one, has proof that the secret hierarchy of Samothrace had no connection with the Druids in Cæsar's, or at any other time, it would give me a peculiar satisfaction to be supplied with it. Meanwhile, I would like to point out the probability (to put it mildly) that the most highly educated scientific experts in the known world would at least know as much about one another as, today, for instance, a thirty-third degree Freemason would know about the Grand Orient.

Cæsar, representing materialism, did his utmost to smash druidism by slaying its adherents and blackening the reputations of its hierarchy, just as it has always been the way of the advocates of iron tyranny to smash or to discredit spiritual movements. But in spite of Cæsar's unsupported account of the Druids, they had an extraordinary reputation, even in Rome. See Diodorus Siculus: "They (the Druids) speak the language of the Gods." He speaks of them also as "exhorting combatants to peace, and taming them like wild beasts by enchantment." Diogenes Laertius says: "they taught men to worship the Gods, to do no evil, and to exercise courage." Also, "they taught many things regarding the stars and their motions, the extent of the universe and the earth, and the nature of things, and the power and the might of the immortal Gods," says even Cæsar, their detractor. Strabo speaks of their teaching in moral science. Says Lucan: "And ye, ye Druids, to you only is given knowledge or ignorance (whichever it be) of the Gods and the powers of heaven . . . From you we learn that the bourne of man's ghost is not the senseless grave, not the pale realm of the monarch below." Diodorus testifies that "among them (the Druids) the doctrine of Pythagoras prevailed." Compare this with Mr. Smith's contention that the Druids knew nothing about Samothrace.

But again: says Valerius Maximus, "They (the Druids) would fain make us believe that the souls of men are immortal. I would be tempted to call these breeches-wearers fools, if their doctrine were not the same as that of the mantle-clad Pythagoras." Other writers who refer to them in much the same terms are Timagenes, Strabo and Mela. Iamblichus makes the assertion that the Druids did not learn from Pythagoras, but Pythagoras from them.

ROME'S greatest men all seem to have recognized her materialism and to have fought against it. Augustus (himself an initiate of the Mysteries) and others after him succeeded in making a high state of civilization possible in many of the provinces, and waves of that civilization invaded Rome from time to time (as Christianity, too, did in its turn). But the tendency that Cæsar represented had taken too firm hold and Rome corrupted everything that touched her, like the cancer that befouls all blood that comes in contact with it.

I, PERSONALLY, think the world is on the upgrade, though I know that many men of integrity and education disagree from that optimistic opinion. There seems to be a kindliness abroad, a breaking up of standards that are proven false, and a craving for frankness. There is no doubt in my mind that the United States may, if it cares to, blaze a new trail in the history of mankind; I think that is its destiny, which it would hardly be possible to prevent. But it is perfectly clear that materialism will make a hard fight and that, if we adopt Mr. Smith's theory, "that the great majority of people in the world can only be swayed by materialism," we shall find ourselves, in our efforts to progress, in the predicament of the ambitious gentleman who tried to lift himself upstairs by the seat of his pants. If we let Rome set our standards of attainment and of morality and method, we shall do as Rome did, fall as Rome fell, and perhaps, like Rome, be taught from text-books to the helpless youth a dozen centuries from now, with a result that staggers one's imagination to predict unless, by grace of some new inspiration, they should merely point to us as an amazing bad example and pass on—to study China in her golden age. Yours faithfully and friendly—TALBOT MUNDY.

Well, we've had a look at Cæsar from quite a number of points of view. There seems plenty of ground for honest difference of opinion, but not much ground for snap judgment. Cæsar will not be with us at our next Camp-Fire, but at some later one Arthur G. Brodeur, of the University of California and of our writers' brigade, has some things to say about the great Roman and Mr. Mundy must be given his chance to answer the arguments of those who have taken the field against him in this matter. He has already replied to Arthur D. Howden Smith but had not seen the other letters at that time.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

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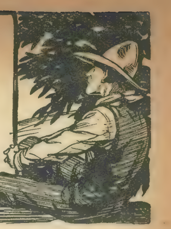
Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4—6. Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
7, 8. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
9. Australia and Tasmania
10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
11. New Guinea
12, 13. Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
13—18. Asia. In Five Parts
19—26. Africa. In Eight Parts
27, 28. Turkey and Asia Minor
29—34. Europe. In Six Parts
35—37. South America. In Three Parts
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39—41. Mexico. In Three Parts
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A. Radio
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H—J. Aviation, Army and Navy Matters
K. American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
L. First Aid on the Trail
M. Health-Building Outdoors
N. Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
O. P. Herpetology and Entomology
Standing Information

A Trip in South Africa

A GOOD climate, good hunting and lots of scenery:

Request:—"My husband and I are very fond of taking camping trips in out-of-the-way places and seeing country that tourists do not go into. We have been over most of our own country in the west and also in Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Is it feasible to take such a trip in Africa and yet not run any great danger from fever and the tsetse fly, also not be frightfully hot?

I have read Keable's 'Mother of all Living,' and in that he describes a camping trip into the mountains of Southeast Africa that sounds delightful. I have also read the trip from 'Cairo to Capetown' in the last National Geographic. It sounds tremendously interesting, but not so enjoyable.

Is it possible to get good hunting and not go into the fever districts? What is the best time of year to go? Could you give me any ideas for an interesting and pleasant trip in Africa?

We want a trip for pleasure and do not want to be eaten alive by mosquitoes or simply melted with heat and yet we do not want to get away from civilization, and we love really roughing it, and are not tenderfeet. I have been in a great many places no other woman has ever been, so the trip doesn't have to be very easy.

I will be grateful if you can give me this information or tell me where I can get it."—Mrs. Ethel Cutler Freeman, Morristown, N. J.

Reply, by Captain Franklin:—I am very glad to receive your letter of a few days ago, as it is just the kind that we of the Ask Adventure class like to receive.

In the beginning, I will say that your letter will not be published in *Adventure* without your consent, at the same time we like to see inquiries of the nature of yours published, as they prove to our readers that we can do what we claim, and that is to supply authentic information pertaining to travel on any part of the globe.

It is gratifying to me that after all your travels you contemplate visiting South Africa, and I note with pleasure that you have been in Labrador where I feel certain you have met my friend Dr. Grenfell.

I will now endeavor to answer your letter very fully. South Africa is the most fascinating and alluring country in every way, especially for people like yourselves who have left the beaten paths and made for the wide open spaces. Like Panama, the danger of the tsetse fly, malaria, dysentery have been almost completely eradicated, and the climate of South Africa is such that you have no qualm of encountering any such conditions as existed a decade ago.

I would like therefore to suggest to you an itinerary. Starting, say, from America in March, which would give you the months of April, May, June, July, August, September and October, without encountering the really hot period, which at its worst doesn't amount to a lot in South Africa, because the heat is always a dry heat and, except in such places as Portuguese East or Natal, does not hurt you—would recommend that you first go to Cape Town. There are many hotels at which you can stop, and it is generally a matter of selecting a hotel that one's friends on the boat are staying at, before deciding. I would then plan to visit Groote Schoor, etc., and a most interesting time can be spent for a few days among the old vineyards of Cape Town and vicinity. I would then visit Kimberly and see the diamond mines. From there on to Johannesburg to see the gold mines. Pretoria, the capital of South Africa, for perhaps a day to see the gold lace. By that time you would probably feel that you would like to spend a few days hunting.

Adventure has a very strict rule that we shall not recommend any guide, philosopher or friend, hotel, bar, or such-like, but "synthetically" I might mention to you the name of Mr. T. E. Brent, Mount Silinda, Mount Setter District, Southern Rhodesia. Mr. Brent can show you the finest hunting in South Africa at less expense than any man of whom I know. He is not a professional guide, but is willing to take care of a few people who may from time to time be sent him. You can go through territory practically untouched by the ordinary hunter, and can get a bag of elephant, lion, buffalo, hippo and most of the lesser antelope.

After your game-hunting experience you would be very close to Beira in Portuguese East Africa, and from there I would suggest that you take the boat to Durban, Natal. Should you so desire I can route you through Zululand which would be intensely interesting, thence into Basutoland where one of my brothers resides, who could show you the interior life and customs of these very remarkable people.

I could also give you many other itineraries, some far more expensive than the foregoing, but for a real pleasure trip at a minimum expense I doubt if this can be beaten.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do NOT write to the magazine itself.

Mexican Oil-Fields

A TAMPICO, where jobs are few, prices high, and the climate poor:

Request:—"Please give me all possible information on the part of Mexico which you cover, mainly in and around Tampico and Mazatlan.

What oil companies and other American businesses are in the city of Tampico; living conditions, climate, business and general conditions for Americans? What chance is there in Tampico or Mazatlan for a young man who is an all around automobile mechanic and driver, one who speaks Spanish?

Do oil and other industries there use many cars and trucks? What are the names and addresses of mining companies in your field? Please do not use my name, if this is printed. I enclose stamp and envelope addressed for reply. Thank you."———, Glenwood Springs, Colo.

Reply, by Mr. Mahaffey:—There are no opportunities for you in or around Mazatlan, and you would be doing a very foolish thing in going there. I was there for over a year and am thoroughly convinced of the fact.

There are two parts of Tampico. One is a regular Mexican town, and the American part of Tampico is a regular American city in the midst of Mexico. Tampico is or was the most expensive place to live in that one could find in many long moons, and any one who goes there should take enough money to support him a month or so and a return ticket home.

Time was, in the good old days, when most anybody could get a good job around the oil fields but those days are gone now. Of course, there is a limited amount of drilling, but chances are far from being as good as they were. Nowadays, with the new immigration law in the U. S., Mexico is full of foreigners who want to come to the U. S. and plenty of them are working for less than an American would consider, just to get by.

It would take me a whole day to tell you all about Tampico, I hardly know where to start.

The many oil companies have trucks for hauling and you might make it. The laws of Mexico require that you have $100 in *gold* on your person if you enter Mexico looking for work, and you will need a passport, secured through the nearest Federal Court or State Naturalization Court; takes about three weeks to get and costs ten dollars. You will need the visé of the nearest Mexican Consul, another ten bucks, and eight dollars head tax when you cross the line. Twenty-eight dollars all told plus your fare, *and* the $100 in gold.

Climate around Tampico is none too good. I know many who lost their health there and were chuck full of malaria germs. Wages are a little better than in the U. S. but living expenses are higher. In my opinion you are better off in the States. It has been a long time since I was around Tampico and conditions have changed for the worst since then.

You might go to Beaumont or Port Arthur, Texasm and strike the Magnolia or Texas Companies for a job in Tampico. It will do no good to give you address, as you should be on the ground to have a Chinaman's chance for a job. Nowdays there are a great many young fellows drifting around in Mexico and most of them *are on the bum*. Mexico is one of the finest places I know of to stay away from at present. If you still have the idea about going, write me and I will try to put you wise.

How to Keep Fit

HEALTH hints for the office worker:

Request:—"I am, to state my case briefly, an office man and have been for many years and naturally my work is rather confining, and the hours that I work do not give me much of an opportunity to get the necessary out-door exercise to keep my physical condition fit. There is nothing constitutionally or organically wrong in my case, with the exception that I am very much under-developed in the muscles of the chest, arms and shoulders. I have forgotten to state before that I am twenty-eight years of age.

I am interested, particularly, to know if you can recommend any exercise or series of exercises by which I can develop these under-developed muscles.

I do not know whether you give individual advice in these cases, but if you don't please pardon me for taking so much of your valuable time. I enclose stamped envelop, with return postage for a reply.

Thank you for any information you may care to give me."—F. S. WILLIAMS, New Orleans, La.

Reply, by Dr. Fordyce:—I know you can improve your health and secure real development of the chest and muscles by walking two miles a day in the open air. Start easy with a half mile if necessary and gradually daily increase.

It will take only an hour's time when you get under way and can be done after the evening meal if necessary.

Coupled with this, I would at bedtime carry out religiously some system of exercise such as Walter Camp's "Daily Dozen." Full directions for these are in booklet form, together with some excellent health-building advice and may be secured for 10c in stamps from The Reynolds Pub. Co., 416 West 13th St., New York City.

I would be pleased to know of your results after trial.

Living in Chinese Treaty Ports

HOW white men get along:

Request:—"For various reasons I am going to reverse Horace Greeley's famous saying into, "Go East, young man; go East." I have picked out China. Could you answer the following questions:

1. Do oil companies or any other industrial concerns pick out and train their men in this country, sending them to China, or do they get them "right on the ground"?

2. If employees are selected in this country, to what companies and at what address should I apply? Which would be preferable—oil, mining or commercial houses? At this point let me explain that I would best be fitted for the sales or office work.

3. What are the chances for advancement in that field? Is competition as keen as in this country?

4. If there is a contract, what are the terms?

5. Are married or single men given preference?

6. Briefly, what is the social status of white men and the standards of living?

7. Do you know how the salaries run? Are men paid in gold? If not how far would the rate of exchange affect salary?

8. What would be best to take along in the line of equipment, such as clothing and other personal belongings which could be purchased more cheaply and easily here?"—S. C. EASTWOOD, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Halton:—1, 2. The Standard Oil Co. sends men out to China. Write them at 26 Broadway, New York, stating fully your qualifications. You might also write to the Pacific Mail S.S. Co., 508 California St., San Francisco, Calif., and to the Admiral Line, L. C. Smith Building, Seattle, Wash., stating fully your qualifications for an office job.

3. The chances for advancement are good if one sticks on the job, and the competition will be from your fellow employees.

4. You would be required to sign a contract for two or three years, and of course the pay will depend on the position you hold.

5. Do not know that any preference is shown as between single and married men. At the starting salary single men can get along better.

6. The standard of living is on a plane with that of the white man in this country, as also is the social life. That is of course in the treaty ports. There are very few places in the interior where a white man would not have to "rough it" considerably.

7. Clerks are paid around $150 gold per month or with exchange around fifty per cent., about $300 Mex. per month. The question of exchange is serious as it fluctuates from day to day in accordance with the price of silver. The lower it goes the more Mexican dollars or local currency you get and "the higher, the fewer." Some of the firms pay in local currency, so that the fluctuations do not affect much unless you are buying gold. It is the general rule that when exchange is low the merchants who buy in Europe or America have to pay in sterling or gold; and as they have to pay more Mexican dollars it naturally raises the price of commodities in local currency to the local purchaser and usually when the exchange raises the merchants are not quick to reduce prices.

8. Shoes are the principal item of clothing to take along; nearly everything else can be purchased cheaper and better out there.

Prospecting by Airplane

HERE'S a new field for the up-to-the-minute gold-hunter:

Request:—"Are there any opportunities in the mining game where airplanes could be used? Are there known ore bodies unworked because supplies can not be brought in or ore taken out?

We are expert airplane men—eight of us. We have seven ships, including four that will carry four to six passengers each. Our 'ceiling' is around 12,000 feet, our normal 'field' is 250 yards, although we can make up-hill landings, down-hill take-offs or work on a ridge (say twenty feet wide). A loose sand will not stop us—sand, say, that would almost stop a car. Our normal cruising range is two hundred and fifty miles, although larger tanks could be put in. We can work on snow or ice—pick fields from the air, drop a man with a parachute to clear away light trees, if necessary. We have parachutes and cameras—but not much cash.

We figure our cost about fifty cents per mile, including salaries, depreciation, etc.

Are there any known inaccessible but commercially profitable ore bodies we could tackle. The location, description of ore, description of near-by landing fields, altitude, description of country is desired.

It might be possible in a very rough country to pick up small loads (ten pounds) without landing and on some favorable days with a forty mile wind it might be possible to pick up a passenger from a ridge on the fly. Or it may be that there is some country it would be worth while exploring which is at present judged inaccessible.

I have had a couple of years college geology, outside of that we know nothing about mining. How about looking for some of the famous lost mines?

Is there something along these lines it would pay us to tackle with one airship or more, or is it all a fairy dream? Any information will be appreciated."—Merrill K. Riddick, Lancaster, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. V. Shaw:—You present an interesting subject and one that is worth considerable thought and discussion, I believe. I've given it some of the thought already. There are many localities so isolated that the costs of transportation preclude any development of ore bodies (except very rich gold) which would be bonanzas if near a railroad. If planes could transport machinery and carry out copper matter or concentrates in sufficient amounts the matter might bear consideration.

As to prospecting and discoveries that are new because of difficulty in traveling afoot, there are many spots among the high Sierras and back inland in such countries as this, for example. You can't get up most of these rivers after April or at least early May because they are too swift; also, the terrane is so heavily timbered and undergrowth so dense that ordinary travel is impeded to the extent that little or no prospecting has been done here off the main water courses or back from tide water beaches and lakes.

If you have a hydroplane in which landings can be made anywhere on water, you could work with your chart and make landings on lakes, inlets, bays, etc., that perhaps are inaccessible now, at least regarding the inland lakes. Also, you could explore cliffs and hills above timberline, that can not and have not yet been reached.

This, however, would be only for plainly visible white quartz veins, dykes of quartzite or light granites and pegmatite, or marked contacts and changes of formation. This last is important. In this region the valuable minerals are all located at or close to these contacts and prospecting is restricted by experts to these areas entirely.

If you had as an observer a qualified geologist or engineer, he could, with a glass, plainly mark such at quite a distance and by flying within fifty feet he could verify his suspicions. This country is so intersected by lakes, bays and inlets, etc., that you could almost always figure on landing fairly close on water, then camp, and make your way afoot to the place.

There are, here and there all over these hills, open muskeg covered with spongy moss into which your feet will sink just above the sole. Whether you could effect a landing is an open question, or whether you'd find one of these where you'd need it.

The topography is much broken, steep hills (average around 2,500 feet, all timbered from tide water. The timberline here is I believe around 4,000 feet altitude. You could make landings on beaches here and there that have fine quartz sands and would be well within your field of 250 yards, but the average beach is pretty well strewn with rocks from as large as your head and down, and with boulders here and there that are much bigger.

COLORADO above timberline would be pickings for your plane but your landings problematical, unless you had a hydroplane and then not certain of finding water where you wished to descend. The desert regions would in general be O.K. for you can always find long open sand stretches of level character. You could fortify yourself with charts giving all the water holes for your camps, and the lack or sparsity of timber would make your work more simple.

I should say, offhand, that desert prospecting by airplane would be rather worth trying, and because mighty unique would probably give you a whole bunch of press notices. You know the Border Patrols on the Mexican line are not having so much trouble even when making forced landings, or so I am informed. Here in Alaska, dropping a man to clear out timber would be putting him in a hole—he might drop right on top of a grizzly whose breakfast had been poor or set wrong, and if the way was clear he'd have trees to clear measuring feet through and hundreds high, and an all summer's job alone simply cutting and not moving the stuff. Wind here is fairly steady for days in one direction, but so many hills you'd have a lot of upcasts, holes, cross currents, etc., to contend with. We have a hydroplane here in town in a hangar but it has not flown this year, though it has been flying previously with what success I can't say; curious passengers taken up mostly, I hear. Population here only 5,000 so nothing in that for you chaps.

EXPLORING is where you could shine—if your flame wasn't extinguished too soon. The huge areas around the Mackenzie River for instance would give you a fine field as there is oil there (?); or the interior of Labrador or Newfoundland; inland in Baja California or Tiburon Id.; the inaccessible peaks of western Mexico, the San Blas country, etc., and you can use your atlas and imagination for a hundred more. I know of buttes in Colorado that no man ever set foot on because their slopes are too steep from any sort of climbing. The inaccessible ore bodies however would be impractical unless you could assure getting in machinery and taking out the product in freight planes. The mere finding of ore would profit nothing of course.

The headwaters of the Peace River, B. C., from the junction of the Findlay and Parsnip up to the northerly and westerly are known to be gold-bearing but have been run over some. You could land there most anywhere and your distance from gas would be perhaps 200 miles airline. The region to the north of the Yukon also, might present possibilities for it is tough going afoot or by dogteam or canoe, and the chances are fair for gold deposits. Your distance from gas there would be greater, use a scale on the map to Fairbanks, Dawson, or Nome. Forget those "famous lost mines"—nothing in it for any one, unless it is some of the old ones formerly worked by the Spanish in Old Mexico.

I like to fool with your idea, it's mightly interesting, hence this long screed, but in a sense you'd be pioneering and it's something for you to try out. You can't be sure till you do. For cash, you might select some feasible scheme, work out the details, then put the proposition up to some wealthy sportsman (with guts), who might take a chance for the novelty of it If you have more ideas along this line let me hear from you again, and the best to you always in any case.

Your premier and final assault on this country thus far has my sympathy. These are smooth waters from the deck of the *Northwestern*, *Queen* or *Admiral Watson*, but the tide rips are hungry, the winds uncertain and ravenous at times, and the rocks are always there for even the larger boats. You've got to be pretty expert as a sailor and know this coast blamed well, then have plenty Lady Luck at command to get by year after year. Old-time salmon trollers in thirty foot gas boats go out and, once in a while, never come back, and sourdough prospectors as well, not all of them being killed by Siwashes or she-bears with cubs, as has been the case hereabout within comparatively short while.

I'm knocking wood all the time and when I am trout fishing for a change of diet I always have my .35 Winchester strapped to my back with a slipknot I can loosen in short order. If the weather looks uncertain I have lots of real urgent business *in camp!* I've seen the wind cut the tops off the waves even in sheltered inlets and hurl it fifty feet in the air in a blinding mist, and these waves can get their backs up in a few minutes time, too. Luck and adios.

South Atlantic Islands

A BARREN, bleak and desolate:

Request:—"I am writing you for information to check up a report I have received from a man who wants to interest me in a trip to these places.

It is in regards to Gough Island, about 40 S. Lat. in the South Atlantic.

About how large is this island? Is it low and sandy or high and rocky? Who does it belong to? What kind of people live there? How about the climate and forest, etc? Is it possible that, as this man says, there is a smaller island some six hundred miles east and a little north of there that has no name on the charts?

Also please give me some information on these following: Crozet Islands, Prince Edward, Marion, Kerguelen.

Also the population as near as you know it, and about fishing, hunting, and climate of each.

Thanks for the attention you give this."—Joe M. Knutson, Toledo, O.

Reply, by Capt. Dingle:—You have selected about the most worthless bits of rock it is possible to find, that is from the point of view of a possible settler. I am sorry that I have no means at hand of giving you very complete data on Gough Island. My reference books are in Bermuda, and my own experience was simply passing by Gough, when it seemed to be a barren, rocky waste, and then it was uninhabited. You can get information about Gough Island by writing to the Hydrographic Office, U. S. Navy, Washington, D. C.

I can tell you about the other islands you name:

Prince Edward Island, belonging to Great Britain, a rocky uninhabited island, sometimes visited by sealers. Lava formation, and snow capped always. Nothing grows except coarse grass and a plant called Kerguelen cabbage. Penguins and seals are plentiful.

Marion Island, one of the so-termed Prince Edward group. Much the same as the other island described above. Volcanic and barren. There is a sealer's camp on the island, but nobody lives there.

The Crozets are French, and more desolate and bleak than the rest. I was on these islands for two weeks once, and if I had to choose between Crozets and —— I'd hunt up my thin underwear and asbestos sandals without delay. There is no population. The world will have to go crazier than it is before there will be any. However, there is fresh water, and plenty of food of the seal and penguin sort. There is a cache of stores for ship-wrecked castaways on Hog Island. The climate, weather, etc., of the islands, as of Prince Edward and Marion, is cold, and stormy, with frequent fogs, and icebergs sail by gaily.

Kerguelen Land, a big island almost seventy miles each way in length and breadth, is the only place you name where human beings might thrive in more or less comfort. Kerguelen is cold, and stormy, but it is deeply indented by bays, and there is at least sustenance for sheep, hogs, and ponies.

It was once a whale and sealing station, but abandoned as such, until recently the French Government made an arrangement with a Norwegian whale fishery and sea elephant hunters concern to work the group.

This firm has a station in Royal Sound, called Port Jeanne d'Arc. Also a Frenchman named Bossière has a lease on Kerguelen, and raises some sheep and pigs. At least, Bossière was there a very few years ago. The place may be utterly deserted again, of course. I speak of conditions in 1918.

I have no idea what you may think you could find on these desolate hummocks of rock, but I can assure you there is nothing on any of them, even Gough, which would repay you for a trip without quite big capital and a big outfit to hunt whale or seal. There is no wood on any of them, and all are bleak and forbidding. Gough is less desolate, perhaps, but even that is only a fly speck on a chart and has no attractions for human beings. You can get charts showing all these islands by asking, when you write to the Hydrographic Office mentioned above, for charts of the South Atlantic, and the South Indian Ocean. Seventy-five cents each.

Luck to you.

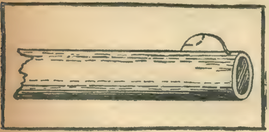
Gun Sights

PHOSPHOR bronze is the most durable metal for this purpose:

Request:—"Being something of a gun crank myself thought I'd drop in for a little chat, also some information.

In a recent issue of *Adventure* you spoke about your pet guns having gold brazed on the regular sights. What I wish to know is your method of having the brazing applied.

Do you cut away a small portion of the rear of the front sight and have gold inserted, as I have tried to show in the accompanying illustration? If not would it be asking too much to have you make a little sketch?"—H. C. Gardner, Denver, Colo.



Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—You have hit exactly upon my method of having gold bead sights attached to the revolver barrel. I do as you describe, cut out the metal to form a support, and have the gunsmith braze in a bit of bright metal, for which he generally uses phosphor bronze, a very durable metal.

I never have a bead effect, but a square blade; the undercutting of the bead seems to weaken the sight, and I have had many rifle sights of the "gold bead" variety brought to me bent or even broken, but never one with a square blade. And the rear of the sight, next the eye, is on a slant from the eye, thus catching the light in any degree of illumination or any angle of refraction.

Hiking in Europe

CHEAP, if you avoid the hotels de luxe:

Request:—"With a companion, I am planning on making a tour of Germany this summer.

My partner is a chemist and somewhat of a metallurgist, and I am a printer and a newspaper man, and so would be interested in such as pertains to our work: electro-chemical plants, newspapers, printing machinery and, perhaps, economical conditions.

We intend to start from Holland, and head up the Rhine River Country, making a circle to the south, as conditions will permit, as far as Munich, after which, we may proceed northeast to Praha, Dresden, and Danzig or to Hamburg, as we would like to embark to Scandinavia from either one of these ports.

This tour is to be in the nature of a walking trip, and we would like to learn what you would consider the best way to go about it. What places you would visit, the amount of luggage necessary, anything which you would consider the best for us to do with the least expense. Could you advise us as to the fare from here to Holland.

We are somewhat acquainted with the language. Would it be possible for us to obtain employment of any kind while there, as we would like to make a study of the various industries."—E. W. Swanson, Cleveland, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Fleischer:—To start from the beginning, I would say that the Holland-American Line, 24 State Street, New York City, have a number of smaller steamers running to Rotterdam, on which the one-class fare is in the neighborhood of $100. However, if you would like to work your way over, as workaway, you would have to come to New York and try the Seaman's Institute on Front Street. They may be able to direct you to the proper place where you could make inquiries.

In most of the German cities, mentioned hereafter, and especially in the Ruhr, you will find quite a number of plants which will come up to specifications. I can not cite them here, but I would suggest that you call on the American Consul at Koln—if we still have one there, I am not certain—and he will gladly direct you.

The following is my suggestion of an itinerary:

Take train from Rotterdam to Wesel (Westphalia) Germany. From Wesel you can follow the Rhine southward on excellent highways. Stop at Duisburg and make this city your headquarters for visiting the various factories or plants in the Ruhr which will interest you. Then down the Rhine via Duesseldorf, Koln, Bonn, Coblenz, Bingen to Mainz. In all the places mentioned you will find smaller hostelries which will afford you shelter and good food for little money. Do not look for them in the main streets, however.

From Mainz follow the river Main eastward to Frankfort. In that city you will find one of the best, if not the best German newspaper. The *Frankfurter Zeitung*. From there through the Spessart Forest to Wuerzburg, where you can taste the best beer brewed, then on to Nürenberg. If you care to see Münich, go by rail from Nüremberg, for foot travel in Bavaria is at the present not to be recommended.

From Münich follow Isar River northeast to Lanshut, North to Regensburg on the Danube. See the Valhall there, then continue *via* Falkenstein, Wilting to Fuerth. Fuerth is Bavarian Custom's center as is Taus across the line in Czecho-Slovakia. From Taus, northeast *via* Stankau to Pilsen, beautiful highway through Bohemian Forest. Pilsen is an industrial center, you will find much of interest there.

My advice is to take the railroad from Pilsen as far as Beraun, about fifty miles. Get off at that place and follow the Beraun River *via* Karlstein (old castle) to Prague. You haven't seen Europe if you miss Prague, for it is the oldest center of learning. From Prague take the dinky river steamer on the Moldau to Melnik on the Elbe River. Then follow that stream northwest *via* Leitmeritz, Aussig, Bodenbach through the Bohemian-Saxon Switzerland, as it is called, into Germany again (Saxonia) to Dresden. From there a walk to Berlin would be very uninteresting, since the country is flat. There are good roads, however, if you *want* to walk. You can walk to either Berlin, Hamburg or Danzig, but it is some distance one way or the other.

Now as to outfit. The usual American hiker's costume is advisable. High, laced walking-boots, knickers, wool stockings and a pair of thick-soled oxfords. Do not take any pack whatever, but when you get to Germany buy yourself, at little cost, a *Rucksack* which is a triangular bag made of strong cloth with shoulder straps, which will hold all you need. A strong cane, spiked, can also be cheaply purchased abroad. If you feel the need of an automatic, you can buy one in Germany and get a permit at the same time. I do not know how much the permit will cost, but it won't be much.

You will do well, to purchase a loaf of German peasant bread, cut it into halves, and you and your partner can carry a half in the pack together with hard sausages for which Westphalia is known. These rations will keep you during the day and you can always get butter, eggs, etc., as soon as you are out of the industrial region at any one of the numerous farms which dot Germany. You can even secure lodging at very little cost.

As to employment, I do not know. Germany has also unemployment to contend with and I am afraid that you would not find anything suitable, except, perhaps, that you might, if you know German well enough, do translations for technical firms. But that's only a guess.

If you really mean to go and so have made up your mind, write me again when you are ready and I will give you some letters of introduction to some people who will help you over there.

Homesteading in Colorado

LOTS of land still available:

Request:—"Will you kindly send all of the necessary information in regard to homesteading in Colorado.

What is the land best adapted to?

Am especially interested in land west of the Dolores River."—A. R. CAMMACK, Cincinnati, O.

Reply, by Mr. Middleton:—There are something like six million acres of land open to homestead entry in the State of Colorado and about one third of this lays in Moffat and Rio Blanco counties in the northwestern part of the State.

Land in this territory is adapted to the raising of small grains, such as wheat, oats, barley, rye, etc., and alfalfa, timothy and native hay. Vegetables such as cabbage, potatoes, carrots, beets, onions, beans, etc., etc., and in sheltered places the small berries are raised even to strawberries; also some fruit. These counties lay in the Glenwood Springs land district and a letter addressed to Walter Spencer, State Registrar, Glenwood Springs, Colo., will bring results in the way of information as to land now open to entry, etc. I should strongly advise that you have a look at Northwest Colorado before deciding upon settling elsewhere.

Rio Dolores River flows through the extreme southwest part of the State. Land in this territory lies in the Durango Land district. I will not attempt to advise you upon this part of the State, as it has been several years since I was there and there have been changes down there, I am sure. There are some 300,000 acres of land in this district, open to entry. I advise that you address a letter to each of the following addresses, requesting that they mail you literature on Southwest Colorado; do not know what the Registrar's name is at Durango, but a letter just addressed to the State Registrar at that address will bring a reply.

I am enclosing a leaflet on homesteading that may be of interest. Send for the leaflets mentioned; they will supply you with full information which I have not the space for; believe that the land office will be able to fix you out. This leaflet is intended for those who have means and are desirous of bringing the homestead to a self-sustaining basis as quickly as possible. Many, as you undoubtedly know, start on a very small scale and work on neighboring ranches to provide themselves with funds for improvements.

Here are the names of persons who will, I am sure, be glad to furnish you with any information you may request.

Mr. Chas. E. Hall, Secretary, Durango Exchange, Durango, Colo. Mr. Hall can furnish you with authentic information as to all of the San Juan basin. Mr. Charles Bear, Secretary, Dolores Commercial Club, Dolores, Colo., and Mr. F. M. Shidler, Chamber of Commerce, Mancos, Colo. Then for literature on Moffat County, address a letter to Mr. W. P. Finley, Craig, Colo.

Should you decide to have a look at Northwest Colorado, and I am quite sure you will not regret having done so, Craig should be the best place for you and May or June the best time to have the look; there is work to be had over there on ranches or in the mines and I've an idea there will be an oil excitment there next spring.

Hope that this will fix you out; and if you think I might be able to help any in the future, come again at any time.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Homesteading in Portuguese East

WHERE you must have a working capital of at least $10,000 to hope for success:

Request:—"I would like to have some information regarding Portuguese East Africa, and as you are the only authority I know of, I am coming to you. I intend to go down to Africa and settle, and I am thinking about Portuguese East.

How are living conditions down there? Is the cost of living very high? Can land be had there for a reasonable price? How about homesteading? Is the soil fertile? How is the climate—is it healthy or feverish?

What is the general topography of the country near the coast? Is it high or lowland; is it wooded, or open veld; does it rain much, or enough for crops to grow? What are the markets? I am thinking about the country near the port of Beira—there ought to be a good market there.

What are the immigration laws there? Will a person have any difficulty in landing? Any certain amount of money required? What kind of money is used and what is the rate of exchange? Would $1,500 or $2,000 be enough to give me a start? I intend to go down there in April, as I think that is the best time. Now I hope you don't think I am asking a lot of silly questions. There may be some important thing I have forgotten at that, so please give me all the information you can.— C. A. Anderson, Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Warring:—I fear that your capital of $1,500 to $2,000 will not go very far in Portuguese East Africa, in establishing you in any form of agriculture.

However, I will give you what information I can. The land laws have recently been changed and are now as follows:

Leases of lands for five year period, the so-called *entrada*, are—

Land adjoining railways: 4,500 reis per hectare.

Five miles from a railway: 4,500 reis per hectare.

Next to navigable rivers: 4,500 reis per hectare.

Along the sea-shore: 2,800 reis per hectare.

Ten kilometers from R.R.: 4,000 reis per hectare.

Twenty kilometers and farther: 2,000 reis per hectare.

Forty-five hundred reis are equal at the present time to about $4.50 American money.

There are no free homesteads, and all government lands are leased, as above. As I understand it, the prices given above are not by the year, but for a five-year term.

Settlers are going into the Beira district more freely of late, especially Germans, and the prices of both developed and undeveloped lands and farms are likely to advance.

In general I may mention that the whole of East Africa, Tanganyika, Kenya Uganda, and Portuguese East, are making great progress, more especially the first three.

Coffee, sisal, flax, sugar, copra, maize, cotton, wheat, oilseeds, dairying and wool are the main agricultural industries.

Cost of living somewhat higher than in the U. S. The Savoy Hotel at Beira would charge you round about $7 to $8 per day inclusive.

Shipping and market facilities at Beira are good and are expanding.

Immigration laws are sound. You must have $50.00 in your possession when landing.

I am enclosing printed matter dealing with the remainder of your questions.

My personal opinion of the amount of capital you should have to get a successful start in tropical farming, would be around $10,000. I have a friend of mine in Rhodesia, which territory joins Portuguese East Africa, who told me that $8,000 to $10,000 was the very least one should have.

You can not toil under the African sun as you could in California. In Africa the black man does that for you.

Since you do not propose to go until April next, I will get in touch with some friends of mine in Beira, and get the lay of the land for you. If you change your address let me know.

Florida's West Coast

WHERE to go and where to settle:

Request:—"I would like to know something of the coast below Fort Myers, Fla. If it is livable and settled to any extent?

I own ten acres at a place called River View about nine miles up the river from Fort Myers. I have never developed this property though I have had it for some years. It faces on the riverfront and I think, under certain conditions, is subject to overflow.

I rather think I would like to dispose of this property and invest the money in some place where I can build as near an ideal home as possible, close to water, good grove soil, good fishing.

I understand most of the development is at present on the east coast. Would like your ideas as to the most ideal location for such a home that could be made with a moderate outlay of money.

I like the Fort Myers section but it has the disadvantage of being too far from any good beaches.

I wish to thank you in advance for your information. Please do not publish my name."— —— ——.

Reply, by Mr. Liebe:—The coast below Ft. Myers is settled thinly, there being few towns and those very small, down to Marco, which also is very small; Marco is on a little island that is separated from the mainland by less than a quarter of a mile of water. Below Marco, there isn't very much of anything, but mangrove and mosquitoes, a jumble of tiny islands, scrubby woods, swamp, etc.

I don't know the particular place, Riverview, you mention, but unless it is very low it should have advanced in value within the last year. As for selling it, I can't help you there. I rather think you would either have to get hold of some reliable real estate man or else come down and see to the selling yourself.

It is a fact that most of the development down here is on the east coast, though all of Florida is growing. If I were looking for an ideal spot for a home, I think I would pick on Orlando, Eustis, or Lakeland, in central Florida. You would have good water, and comparative freedom from mosquitoes in any of the three towns named, and on any coast the water is bad and the mosquitoes ditto. Water to drink, here, is mostly bought in bottles. Central Florida has as good hunting, on an average, and better fishing, unless you hire a cruiser and go out to the Gulf Stream at from $25 to $40 per day.

Good coast towns, in my opinion, are Sarasota, Tampa, and St. Petersburg, on the west coast; and Daytona, Melbourne, and Ft. Lauderdale, on the east coast.

As to the cost of building, it would probably be a little cheaper than in your present location, since houses need not be built so well owing to the mild climate.

The east coast has, of course, the best beaches, notably those from Palm Beach north, and especially those at Daytona and New Smyrna.

The thing for you to do, unquestionably, is to come down here and dispose of your land, and see things for yourself. And after more than six years in Florida, I like the interior, the center, of the State far better than any of the coast regions.

Your name will not be published in the event this is used in the magazine, as you request.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

EDITOR'S NOTE—Because of complications concerning copyright that developed at the last moment it was necessary to omit from this issue the Old Songs department.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JULY 20TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

A MAN'S DOG — ***Alanson Skinner***
He counted coup again.

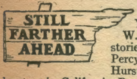
THE BOLD DRAGOON A Four-Part Story Part II — ***Leonard H. Nason***
Hugh Bancroft goes a-sailing.

BOON OF THE WILDERNESS — ***Michael J. Phillips***
They called the camp cook a coward.

FIVE POUNDS PER TON BONUS — ***Ralph R. Perry***
America wanted dates—quickly.

YU DUCK, SEA LAWYER — ***Captain Mansfield***
He was such a help to the captain.

DOGIE — ***Chester T. Crowell***
The kid had a way with horses.



The three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Gordon Young, Talbot Mundy, Gordon MacCreagh, Charles Victor Fischer, John Webb, W. Townend, H. Bedford-Jones, Georges Surdez and Thomson Burtis; and short stories by Raymond S. Spears, Walter J. Coburn, Fairfax Downey, Leslie McFarlane, Percy Charles Chandler, Stanton C. Lapham, F. St. Mars, Nevil Henshaw, S. B. H. Hurst, Alan Le May, Fred F. Fleischer, Rolf Bennett and others; stories of gold-hunters in California, Romans in ancient Britain, explorers up the Amazon, gobs with the Atlantic fleet, fur-trappers in the Northwest, cavalrymen with the A. E. F., Malay guides in Borneo, hardcase skippers on the Caribbean, bullfighters in Gibraltar, cowboys on the Western range, adventurers the world around.

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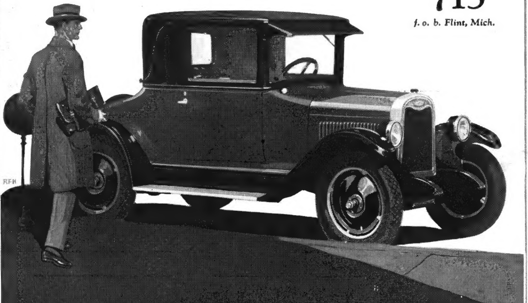

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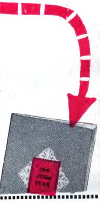

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